アフタヌーンKC

五年生

"The 5th Grade"

Soma Yoshito & Shimo Akio The Story is close to you.

4

木尾士目

Kio Shimoku

Parents, Friends, Found
Their relationship
They haven't reached
the conclusion about th
It's a pitiful and distress

五年生

The 5th Grade 4

木尾士目

Chapter 19	*Ending*
Chapter 20	*Unidentified Clinical Syndrome*
Chapter 21	*Meaningless Distance*
Chapter 22	*Witch I*
Chapter 23	*The Form Seduction Takes*
Chapter 24	*Intersection I*
	The Useless Things I Knew

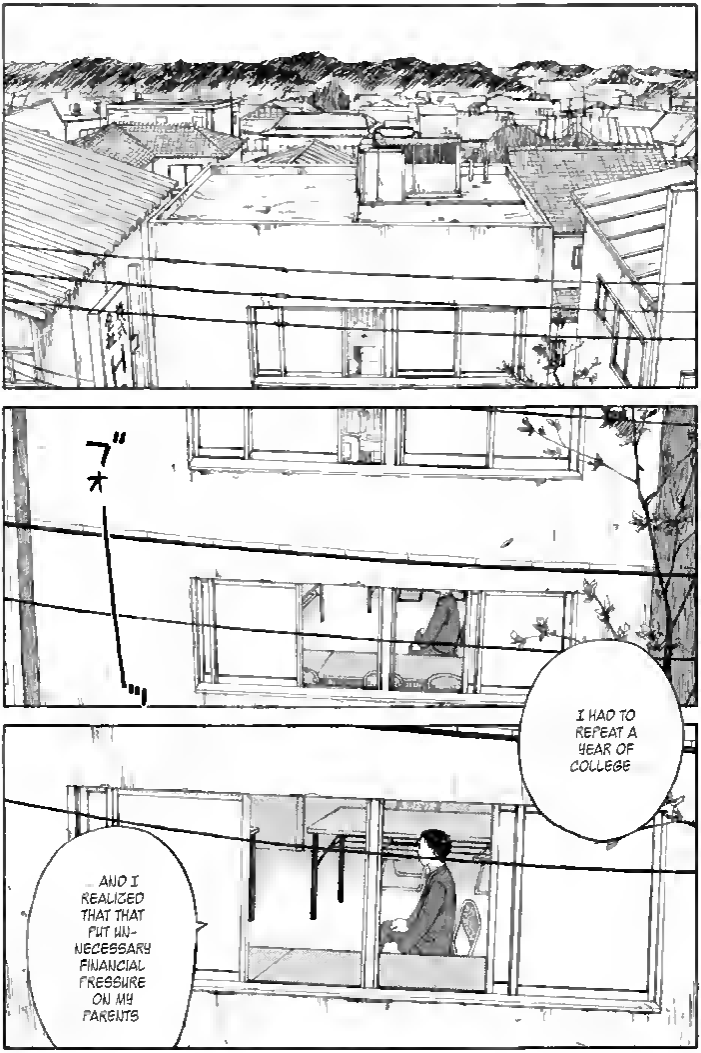
五年生

"The 5th Grade"
Soma Yoshino & Shima Akio. The Story is close to you

4

Kio Shimoku

Chapter 19 - Ending


I HAD TO REPEAT A YEAR OF COLLEGE
... AND I REALIZED THAT THAT PUT UN-NECESSARY FINANCIAL PRESSURE ON MY PARENTS

IT'S TIME FOR ME TO LEAVE THE NEST
I DON'T WANT TO TROUBLE THEM ANYMORE
I'VE COME TO LIKE IT HERE IN KISARAZU AND THE RENT BEING CHEAP IS A PLUS, TOO
SO WITH THAT IN MIND, I CAME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT GETTING A JOB HERE WOULD BE FOR THE BEST

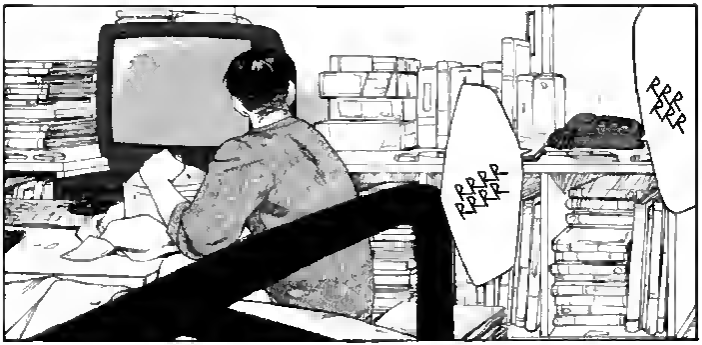
DON'T YOU THINK THAT HEADING BACK HOME WOULD COMFORT YOUR PARENTS MORE? EARLIER YOU SAID THAT YOU THOUGHT THEY WORRIED ABOUT YOU
I THINK THAT CAN WAIT UNTIL AFTER I CAN SHOW THEM I'VE BECOME A PRODUCTIVE MEMBER OF SOCIETY
HMM
I SEE YOU'RE QUITE TALL
WELL
I'M SIX FOOT ONE

WELL
HMM
IT DOESN'T MATTER THAT MUCH
MMM
DO YOU HAVE A DRIVER'S LICENSE? I SEE THE ANSWER IS NO
BUT EVEN THEN, OUR LINE OF WORK DOES INVOLVE QUITE A LOT OF PHYSICAL WORK
THOUGH WE DO HAVE SOME EMPLOYEES, LIKE MR YASUDA, WHO'RE QUITE THIN
HMM WE DEAL MOSTLY IN INTERMEDIARY TRADE
OF COURSE THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME
I THINK THAT'S ABOUT IT FOR TODAY
WELL THEN, WE'LL CALL YOU WITH THE RESULTS

YEAH, TAKE CARE
THANK YOU FOR THE INTERVIEW
Phew

HAH, I ENVY YOUR YOUTH LOOK AT ME, AN OLD MAN STILL ON THE SEARCH FOR A DECENT JOB
I WONDER IF THE UN-EMPLOYMENT RATE WILL EVER GO DOWN
RIGHT
EXCUSE ME, BUT ARE YOU A COLLEGE STUDENT?
HMM? OH, YES, I AM
Excuse me
SOMEHOW I DON'T THINK A NUMBER GOING DOWN IS GONNA HELP SOME PEOPLE
Whoa

I've made up my mind to get a job in Kisarazu.
Hmm
The path of least resistance.
It'll mean the least change for me.
It fits me.


RRR RRR
RR RRRR RR

H'LO? SHIMA AKIO SPEA-KING
RRRR

YEAH UH HUH SURE, SOME-TIME SOON
GOTCHA
HUH?
HAHA, WELL, LET'S JUST SAY IT'S A LONG STRING OF "I M VERY SORRY BUT"S AND "WE REGRET TO INFORM YOU"S
OH, UMM HI, PRO-FESSOR
MR SHIMA IT'S ME, TANI-YAMA

I THINK IT'S ABOUT DONE
WELL THEN
TIME TO EAT

GOOD MOR-NING

OH UMM HEY
HEY GUESS WHAT?
I GOT A JOB!
WHAT?
REALLY? GRATS
That's great
IT WAS WORTH IT GOING BACK HOME FOR A WHILE
It was worth skipping classes
SO WHERE IS IT?
IT'S CALLED NERIMA, YOU CAN REACH IT FROM THE SEIBU IKEBUKURO LINE
NO, NO, I DIDN'T MEAN THAT
OH, THE JOB? IT'S AT A LAND TRANSPORT COMPANY CALLED TOYOTSU

DON'T YOU THINK I'LL BE PRETTY GOOD AT IT?
YUP
PRETTY LUCKY CONSIDERING THE ECONOMY LATELY
FINK COLLAR JOB, EH?
YEAH, SEE YA
I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO TAKE CARE OF LATER!
WELL, ANYWAY

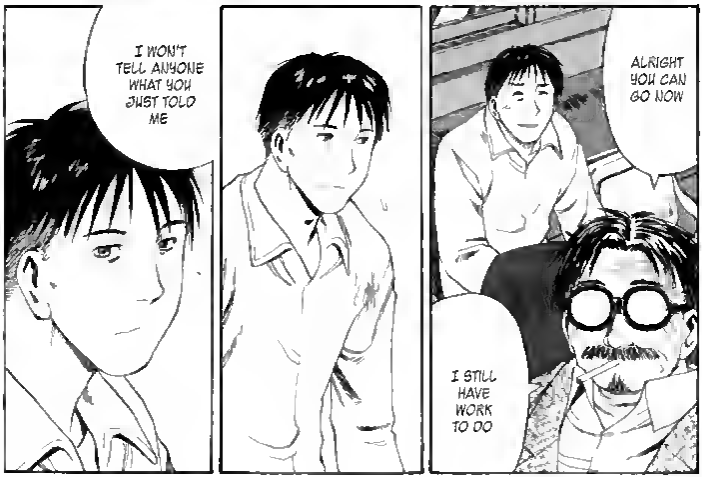
AH, MR SHIMA
JUST A MOMENT
SUP
UH HUH
YOU HEARD RIGHT
AND I HEAR YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A JOB HERE IN KISARAZU
I SEE YOU GOT A HAIRCUT
WELL, YEAH
?

YOU TWO BROKE UP?
WHAT? WAIT...
WELL, PRETTY MUCH, YEAH
HOW'RE YOU GOING TO MEET MS SOMA?
IF YOU GET A JOB HERE
IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE WE TALKED
WELL, ACTU-ALLY
SOME-THING WRONG?

WANT ONE?
I GOT MY OWN, BUT THANKS
THE HEAD AT THE FIRM MS. SOMA'S INTERNING AT IS A MAN CALLED NARITA.
WE WENT TO UNI-VERSITY TOGETHER
SO ANY-WAY, I GAVE HIM A CALL A WHILE AGO
ASKED HIM HOW MS. SOMA WAS DOING.

HE SAID THAT LATELY SHE'S SUDDENLY BEEN HAVING A HARD TIME CONCENTRATING ON HER WORK, AND SHE KEEPS MAKING MISTAKES
HE SOUNDED LIKE HE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT WAS WRONG WITH HER
IS IT YOU?
IT'S BECAUSE OF YOU, ISN'T IT
HUH?
YOU'VE BEEN PUTTING STRESS ON HER WITH YOUR LOVER'S QUARRELS, HAVEN'T YOU.
C'MON, DON'T BLAME THIS ALL ON ME

WELL, NOT ENTIRELY
.....
ARE YOU PINNING THE BLAME ON HER?
I
LET'S JUST SAY THERE'S A THIRD PARTY INVOLVED IN ALL OF THIS
IT WASN'T ME WHO CHEATED
DID YOU CHEAT ON HER?!
With Ms Yoshimura, eh?!
NAH, IT WASN'T ME


I WON'T TELL ANYONE WHAT YOU JUST TOLD ME
ALRIGHT YOU CAN GO NOW
I STILL HAVE WORK TO DO

YEAH, THANKS
I DIDN'T HEAR ANYTHING
MAN, THE LOOK ON HIS FACE
IT'S LIKE HE WAS SAYING "YOU CAN'T TRUST ANYONE ANYMORE, CAN YOU?"
ばん
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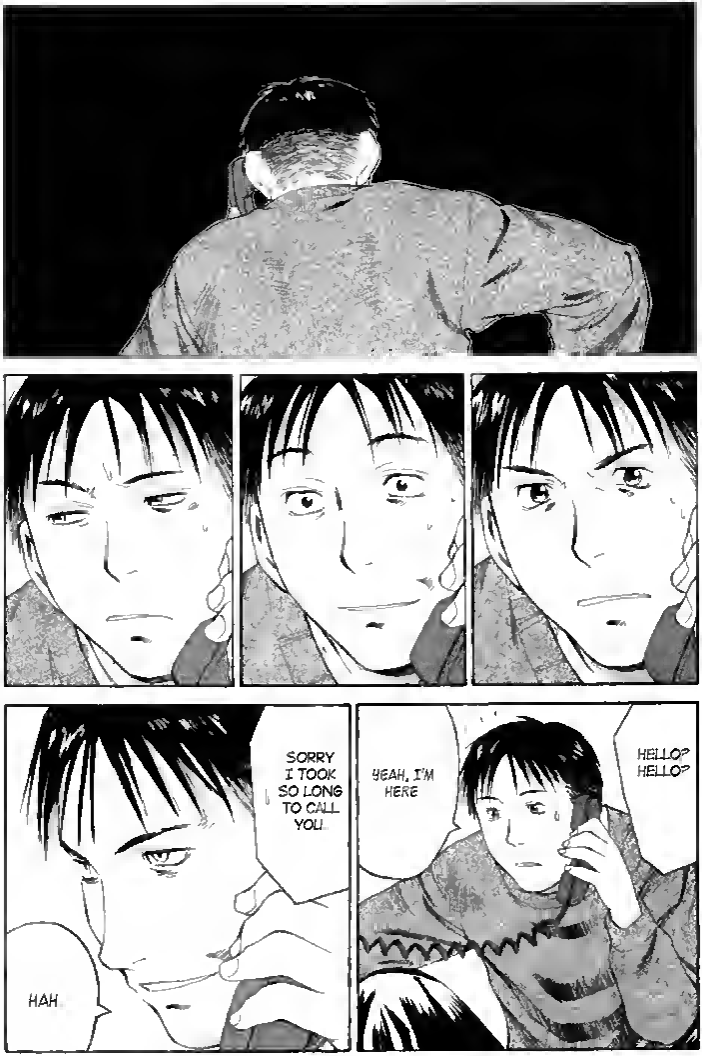
ドンドン

I WAS JUST THINKING THE SAME THING
HAH FUNNY
IT MIGHTA BEEN CLOSER TO "YEAH, THAT'S WHAT THE WORLD IS LIKE"
YEAH, PRETTY MUCH
When
NAH, ACTUALLY,
MAN IF YOU HAVE THAT MUCH EXPERIENCE AT LIFE
OH, UMM HELLO
IT'S ME, YOSHINO IT'S BEEN A WHILE, HUH
HELLO? SHIMA AKIO SPEAKING
DID HE FORGET TO TELL ME SOMETHING?
RRRR
IT WOULDN'T HURT TO GIVE ME SOME ADVICE ON HOW TO HANDLE THIS SHIT Y KNOW?


HELLO? HELLO?
YEAH, I'M HERE
SORRY I TOOK SO LONG TO CALL YOU.
HAH.

FUNNY, I THOUGHT WE WERE ALREADY OVER
WHAT?
NO, NO, OF COURSE NOT!
WE'RE NOT OVER AT ALL!
I'LL BE HONEST WITH YOU. I HAVEN'T MANAGED TO BREAK TIES WITH HIM YET,
BUT I COULDN'T JUST LEAVE YOU IN THE DARK FOR SO LONG AND EVERY-THING.
HELLO? ARE YOU STILL THERE?
YEAH?

SO, UMM HOW'VE YOU BEEN LATELY?
WHY DO YOU WANNA KNOW? IT'S NOT LIKE YOU REALLY CARE
BUT IT'S NOT LIKE I'VE GONE ANY FARTHER WITH HIM, EITHER
OH, YEAH THAT REALLY MAKES ME FEEL BETTER, THANKS
WHAT?
YOU STILL HAVEN'T SPLIT UP WITH THAT... WELL I FORGOT WHAT HIS NAME WAS BUT I'M RIGHT, RIGHT?
I CAN'T PROMISE YOU AN EXACT DATE, BUT...
JUST WAIT FOR ME A LITTLE LONGER, OKAY?
BUT JUST... WELL...
I'M REALLY GOING TO STOP MEETING HIM SOON
I'M TRYING MY BEST, HONEST

THAT'S RIGHT, GOTTA WRITE ANOTHER RESUME
WHOOPS
Hmm
IT DOESN'T HURT THAT MUCH

I ALREADY KNEW THAT WAS ALL OUR RELATIONSHIP MEANT, ANYWAY
DOES THAT MAKE ME A BAD PERSON?
WELL I GUESS THAT'S THE END OF THAT.

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バタン
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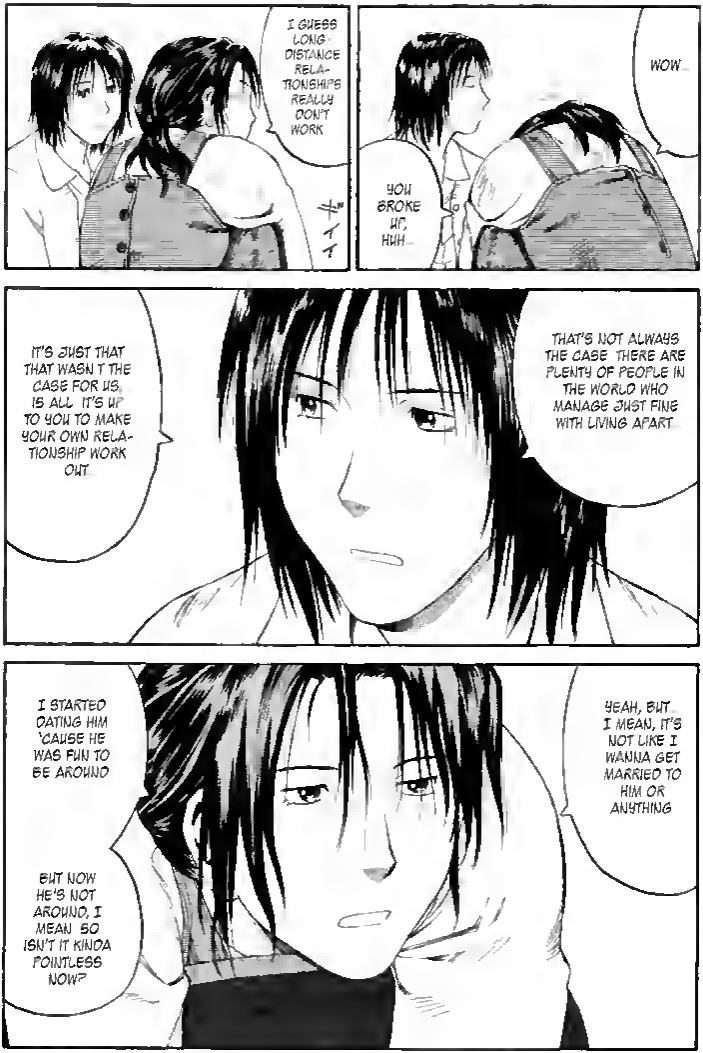
ズオーン
ズオーン
CAN I COME IN?
コン
コン
コン
SURE
ガチャッ
WHOA

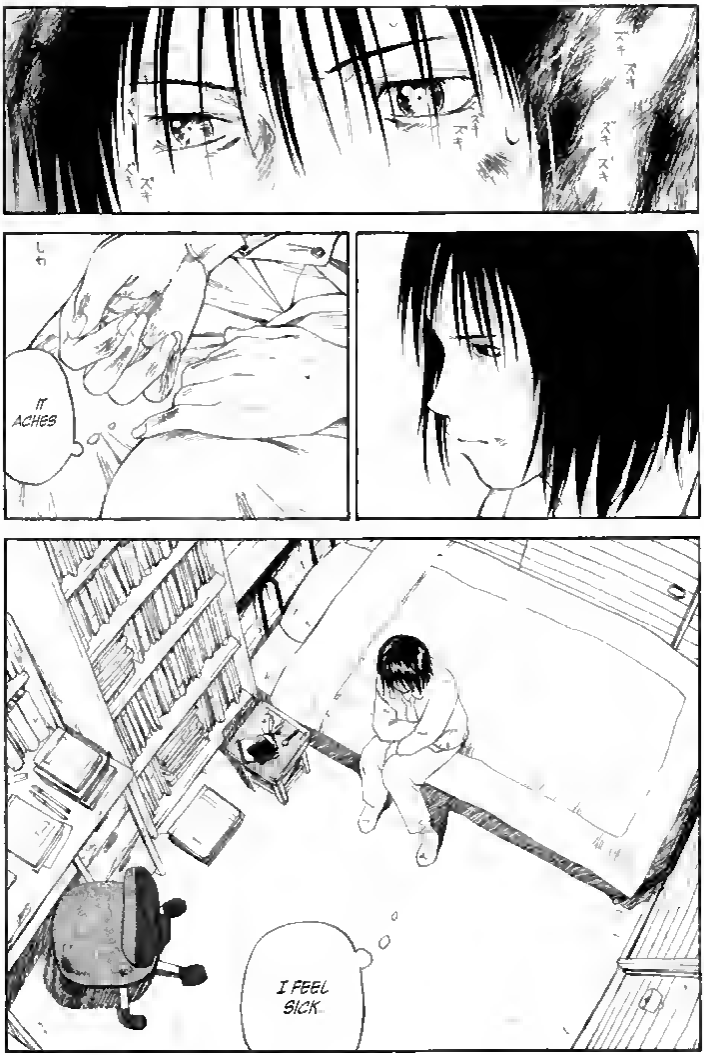
YOU HAVE NO IDEA, SISTER OF MINE I THINK MY BRAIN IS MELTING
Hehehehehh
LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE BEEN STUDYING HARD
AKIO?
Eheheh
SO, WHO WAS THAT ON THE PHONE JUST NOW?
WAIT, SERIOUSLY?
I knew you looked a little down lately
YEAH
HUH?
WE BROKE UP


I GUESS LONG DISTANCE RELA-TIONSHIPS REALLY DON'T WORK
ナイナイ
YOU BROKE UP, HUH...
WOW...
IT'S JUST THAT THAT WASN'T THE CASE FOR US. IS ALL. IT'S UP TO YOU TO MAKE YOUR OWN RELA-TIONSHIP WORK OUT.
THAT'S NOT ALWAYS THE CASE. THERE ARE PLENTY OF PEOPLE IN THE WORLD WHO MANAGE JUST FINE WITH LIVING APART...
I STARTED DATING HIM 'CAUSE HE WAS FUN TO BE AROUND
BUT NOW HE'S NOT AROUND, I MEAN, SO ISN'T IT KINDA POINTLESS NOW?
YEAH, BUT... I MEAN, IT'S NOT LIKE I WANNA GET MARRIED TO HIM OR ANYTHING

NO, IT WASN'T REALLY THAT WAY FOR US, BUT STILL
THE VOICE OF EXPERIENCE I TAKE IT?
HMM
IF YOU STARTED LIVING TOGETHER WITHOUT THINKING IT OVER FIRST YOU'D PROBABLY START HATING EACH OTHER
Actually
IT'S FINE, IT'S NOT LIKE YOU'D WANT TO PUT UP WITH HIM TWENTY-FOUR SEVEN
HMM
Then why'd you even bother telling me that
YES, OF COURSE!
OH! HELLO!
MHMM
HELLO?

MHMM MHMM
OH, NO
RIGHT...
OF COURSE. OKAY, GOOD-BYE THEN
NO, I'M FINE
OKAY, SORRY ABOUT THAT
ANOTHER MAN?

YOU'RE THE WORST
YOU'RE PURE EVIL
AND WOW, YOU'RE REALLY FAST
What do you mean
YOU KNOW, YOU AND YOUR BOY-FRIEND WILL PROBABLY END UP LIKE THIS TO-
THAT'S NOT WHAT YOU WERE SAYING JUST A SECOND AGO!
MEH
I NEED A MID-NIGHT SNACK
ちゃ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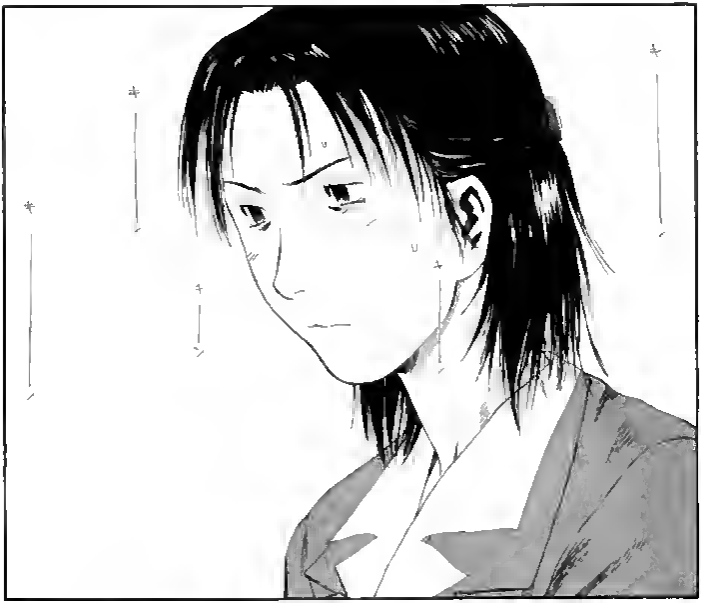
IT ACHES
I FEEL SICK



HOW DID YOU FINISH BEFORE ME?
You're doing twice as much
HOW RE THINGS GOING OVER THERE?
AAAND OFF TO THE PRINTER YOU GO!
I know that!
HONESTLY, AFTER ALL THAT TALK ABOUT FINISHING IT A DAY EARLY THIS TIME
IT'S NOT OVER UNTIL IT'S BEEN GIVEN THE SEAL OF APPROVAL!
ALL YOU HAD TO DO WAS JUST COPY MOST OF IT OVER!
WAIT WAIT, WHAT? WHY RE YOU STILL ON THIS PART?
I'M SORRY
AH...
AND HOW ABOUT OVER HERE?
HMM?

I KNOW I WAS THE ONE WHO ASKED YOU TO HELP, BUT IF YOU DON'T THINK YOU CAN DO IT THEN JUST TELL ME
AH
SWITCH WITH ME
WHATEVER I'LL DO IT
JUST ORGANIZE THE DOCUMENTS THAT I JUST PRINTED AND STACK THEM ON MY DESK
OKAY
AH, SO WE STILL ENDED UP WITH SO MUCH
JUST HURRY UP AND GET GOING, MR. NARITA'S PROBABLY ALREADY THERE

HE'S ALWAYS SO UN-ORGAN-IZED
YES, HE IS
ALRIGHT THEN, I'M OFF
JUST DON'T FALL ASLEEP ON THE TRAIN
BE CARE-FUL, MR KURAI-HASHI
IT MIGHT BE A LITTLE EARLY, BUT I THINK WE COULD BREAK FOR LUNCH NOW
OH, RIGHT...
HELLO?
ピリリリリ

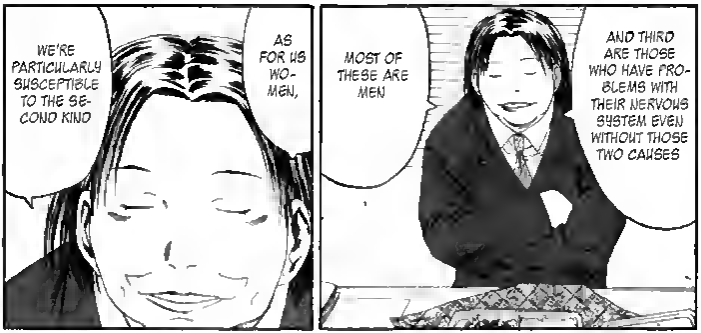
HMM? OH, RIGHT.
YES. HE JUST LEFT
ALRIGHT I'LL GET ON THAT AFTER LUNCH
PARDON?
OH, YES, IT WAS RIGHT DOWN TO THE WIRE
AH, I SEE
RIGHT, RIGHT ALRIGHT THEN TAKE CARE, SIR
MR NARITA?
MHMM WANTED TO KNOW IF KURAHASHI'D LEFT YET
HAHA

OH? ARE YOU SKIPPING LUNCH AGAIN?
OH UMM, YES I JUST HAVE NO APPETITE LATELY
IT LOOKS TO ME LIKE YOU'RE JUST NOT FEELING WELL IN GENERAL
AH
YES, I THINK YOU MIGHT BE RIGHT
WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS LIKE?
HUH?

AND MY HANDS AND FEET ACHE TOO
LATELY I'VE EVEN BEEN HEARING A RINGING IN MY EARS
YES, IT DOES ALSO, THERE'S THIS THIS PAIN BEHIND MY EYES
WELL, I'M THINKING THAT IT MIGHT BE AUTONOMIC IMBALANCE
DOES YOUR HEAD HURT?
Hmm
I'M SO SORRY
I KNOW THAT MY EFFICIENCY IS SUFFERING BECAUSE OF IT
I
AUTONOMIC IMBALANCE IS SORT OF A BROAD TERM, DON'T YOU THINK?
REALLY?
THOUGH...
Right
YOU SHOULD LOOK INTO GETTING TREATMENT FOR THAT
HMM, ALRIGHT

SYMPTOMS LIKE HEADACHES AND RINGING IN THE EARS AREN'T NECESSARILY UNIQUE TO AUTONOMIC IMBALANCE
BY AND LARGE, THINGS LIKE THOSE ARE ALL GROUPED TOGETHER UNDER "UNIDENTIFIED CLINICAL SYNDROME"
REALLY?

MHMM. AND YOU CAN SPLIT THAT INTO THREE GENERAL CATEGORIES
FIRST IS THE TYPE WHERE THE PATIENT HAS SOME SORT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEM CAUSING THE SYMPTOMS, BUT THEIR NERVOUS SYSTEM ITSELF IS FINE
SECOND, PEOPLE WHO SUFFER FROM SO MUCH STRESS THAT IT AFFECTS THEIR AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM AS WELL

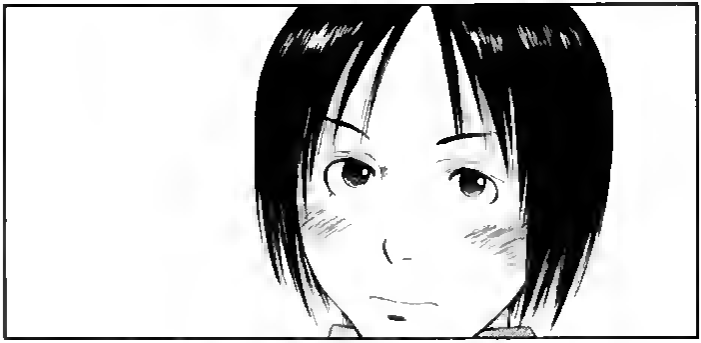

AND THIRD ARE THOSE WHO HAVE PROBLEMS WITH THEIR NERVOUS SYSTEM EVEN WITHOUT THOSE TWO CAUSES
MOST OF THESE ARE MEN
AS FOR US WOMEN,
WE'RE PARTICULARLY SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE SECOND KIND

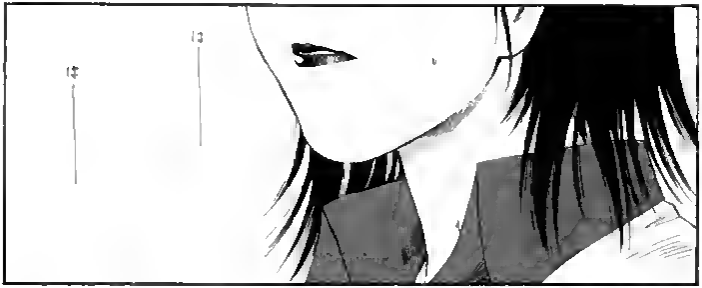
Some need medicine others need counseling
IT'S BECAUSE ALL THREE KINDS RESPOND BEST TO DIFFERENT KINDS OF TREATMENT
THAT'S WHY IT'S VERY IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO KNOW WHICH CATEGORY YOU FALL INTO
AND DO YOU KNOW WHY THEY BOTHER DIVIDING IT INTO THESE THREE CATEGORIES?
SO, HONEY, WHERE WOULD YOU SAY YOU FALL?
IT'S BEST TO GET AN EXPERT TO DIAGNOSE ANY PROBLEMS YOU MIGHT HAVE WITH YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM
WELL WHICHEVER TYPE YOU ARE I THINK THE FIRST STEP WOULD BE VISITING A HOSPITAL.
A WOMAN DOESN'T MAKE IT TO SO WITHOUT PICKING UP SOME KNOWLEDGE
YOU KNOW SO MUCH ABOUT THIS

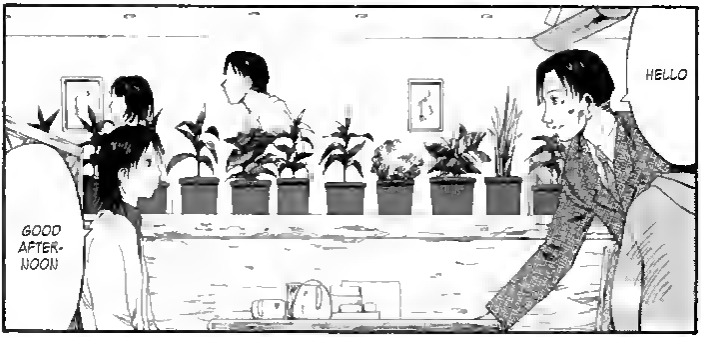
RIGHT
ポ
カチ
ポ

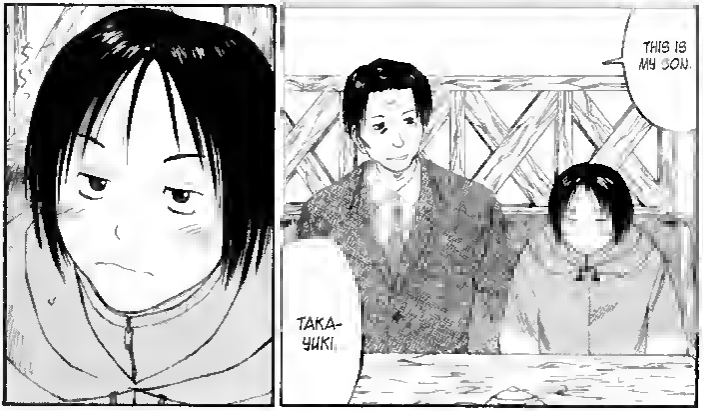
OF COURSE I'M FEELING STRESSED
Maybe I should take some medicine
I KNOW EXACTLY WHY, TOO
BUT I STILL GO TO SEE HIM

BECAUSE IT GETS BETTER WHILE I'M WITH HIM



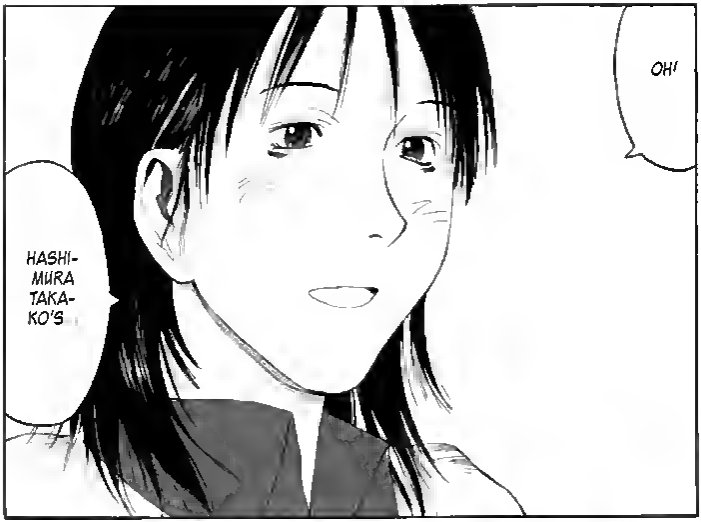



HELLO
GOOD AFTER-NOON


THIS IS MY SON.
TAKA-YUKI.

Assam tea, please. Just two cups.
I CAN'T GET A GOOD HANDLE ON HIM FROM MY FIRST PRESS ON!
HI, TAKAYUKI
OH, I SEE
?
HMM?
SAY HELLO, TAKAYUKI

HE LIKES READING BOOKS.
I TOLD HIM THAT YOU ENJOY READING, AS WELL.
FORGIVE HIM, HE'S VERY BASHFUL.
HMM? THERE'S SOMETHING I'M FORGETTING...
.....
AS IT TURNS OUT, TAKAYUKI LIKES HER AS WELL.
OH...
AH, YES, BUT THERE WAS A WRITER WHO YOU MENTIONED TO ME ONCE.
IF I RECALL, YOU SAID SHE'D WRITTEN...
I REMEMBER YOU SAID SHE WAS A NOVELIST.
THE ONLY OTHER BOOKS I READ ARE THE ONES MY SISTER BRINGS HOME FROM THE LIBRARY, FROM TIME TO TIME.
AH, BUT... I ONLY READ TEXTBOOKS AND MANUALS, FOR STUDYING.


OH!
HASHI-
MURA
TAKA-
KO'S

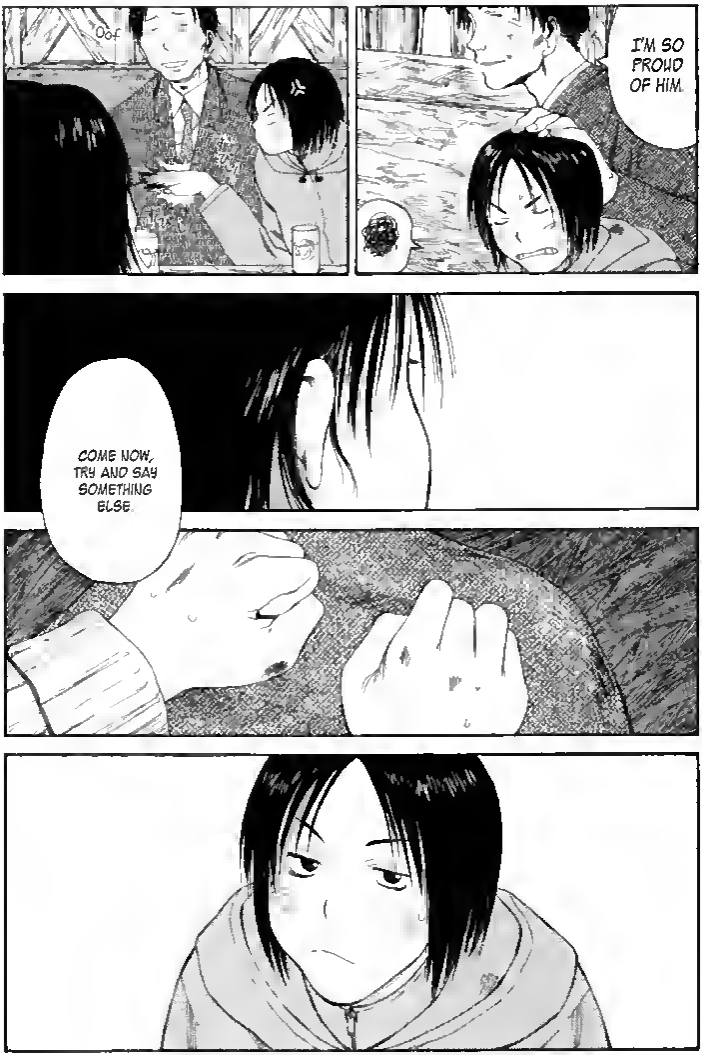
THE
NEVER-
ENDING
EAST

THAT'S RIGHT
THE NEVER-ENDING EAST
THAT'S THE ONE
HEY, DID YOU KNOW?
THAT ONE IS ACTUALLY MY FAVORITE,
TOO

IT'S RUDE TO INTERRUPT PEOPLE, TAKAYUKI.
TAKA-YUKI, AREN'T YOU
OH WAIT
THAT'S RIGHT!

OH, YOU FORGOT HE WAS HARD OF HEARING, DID YOU?
FROM THOSE WHO SIMPLY HAVE TROUBLE HEARING DISTANT OR LOW SOUNDS, TO OTHERS WHO REQUIRE MECHANICAL AID IN ORDER TO HEAR ...
HEARING LOSS IS AN AFFLICTION THAT COMES IN MANY DEGREES
TOTAL ANACUSIS IS ACTUALLY EXTREMELY RARE
BUT THANKS TO HIS HEARING AID, HE HAS NO TROUBLE HEARING MOST SOUNDS
MY SON IS ON THE FAR END OF THE SCALE,

THANKFULLY HE'S QUITE OBSERVANT AS WELL, SO HE CAN EVEN SPEAK TO SOME DEGREE
HE'S WEARING A HEARING AID? I CAN'T TELL...
IT'S QUITE DIFFICULT TO PRONOUNCE, AND THANKS TO HIS EFFORTS IN LEARNING HOW TO SAY IT, HIS SKILL AT PRONOUNCING OTHER WORDS HAS ALSO GREATLY IMPROVED
THE TITLE OF THE BOOK THAT HE MENTIONED JUST NOW IS A SERIES OF SOUNDS HE PARTICULARLY ENJOYS ENUNCIATING


Oof
I'M SO PROUD OF HIM.
COME NOW, TRY AND SAY SOMETHING ELSE.

HEY
YOU LIKE BOOKS?
WHY?

YES.
I LOVE BOOKS
WHY DID YOU ORCHESTRATE THIS SITUATION?

ARE YOU TELLING ME THAT YOU'RE NOT ASHAMED OF MEETING ME, THAT I'M NO-THING BUT A FAMILY FRIEND,
AND THAT YOU DON'T WANT ME TO THINK ABOUT BECOMING ANYTHING MORE?
OR ARE YOU INTRODUCING YOUR CHILD TO ME BECAUSE YOU THINK HE SHOULD GET TO KNOW ME BEFORE YOU MARRY ME?
ARE YOU TELLING ME TO BECOME A MOTHER TO HIM?

ARE YOU PLANNING ON WORKING WITH ME IN THE FUTURE?
OR ARE YOU JUST TRYING TO GIVE ME MORE EXPERIENCE AS A LAWYER?
BUT I

BUT I CAN'T MEET A SINGLE ONE OF THOSE EXPECTATIONS...

eeeeeeee...
MY EARS ARE RINGING AGAIN.

I CAN'T HEAR ANY-THING AROUND ME
ONCE MY EARS START RINGING,

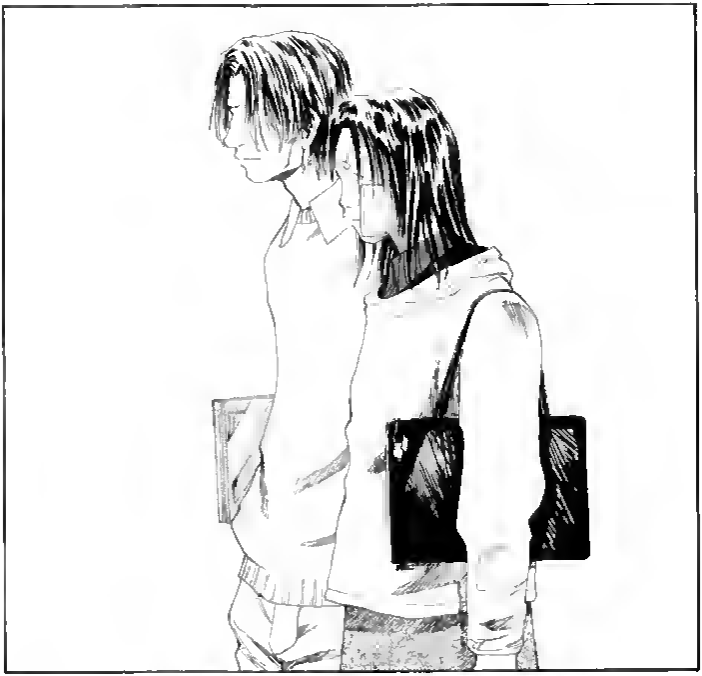
I HAVE A HEADACHE
BUT MY BRAIN ITSELF CAN'T FEEL ANY PAIN

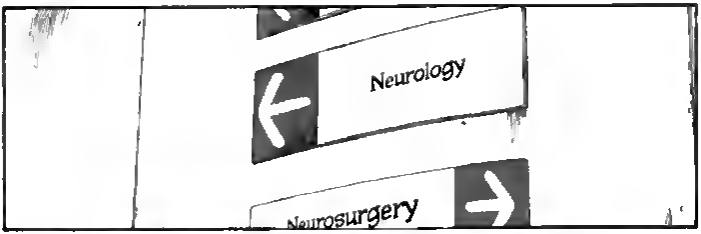
MY EARS TAKE IN SOUND...
BUT I CAN'T ACTUALLY HEAR ANYTHING

I LOOK AROUND MYSELF RIGHT NOW
BUT I CAN'T SEE A THING
IN THE END, I REALIZE
I UNDERSTAND NOTHING AT ALL

Chapter 20 - End

Chapter 21 - Meaningless Gap

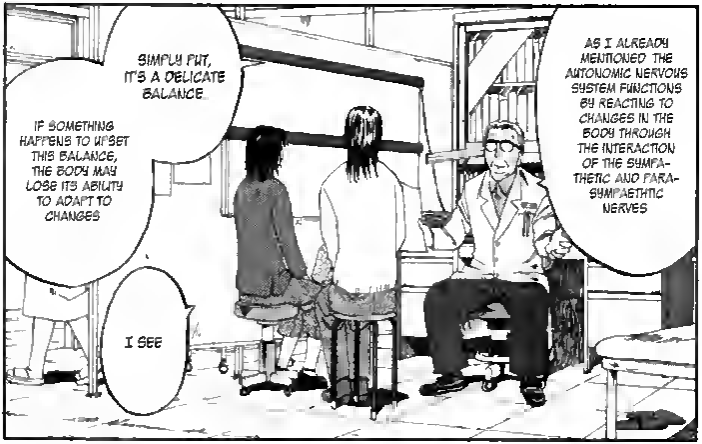



Neurology
Neurosurgery

WELL, LET'S BEGIN WITH DIAGNOSIS BY EXCLUSION, SHALL WE?
THE BLOOD TEST, X-RAYS, AND ECG RESULTS ALL INDICATE THAT YOU HAVE NO MAJOR PROBLEMS ON THOSE FRONTS

WE CAN RULE OUT ANYTHING LIFE-THREATEN-ING

ALLOW ME TO EXPLAIN THAT FART IN MORE DETAIL
THE AUTONOMIC NERVOUS FUNCTION TEST, HOWEVER, DID RETURN WITH SOME CONCERNING RESULTS


SIMPLY PUT, IT'S A DELICATE BALANCE
IF SOMETHING HAPPENS TO UPSET THIS BALANCE, THE BODY MAY LOSE ITS ABILITY TO ADAPT TO CHANGES
I SEE
AS I ALREADY MENTIONED THE AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM FUNCTIONS BY REACTING TO CHANGES IN THE BODY THROUGH THE INTERACTION OF THE SYMPATHETIC AND PARASYMPAETHTIC NERVES

THERE ARE PARTS HERE THAT WERE RECORDED WHILE YOU WERE LYING DOWN, AND OTHERS FROM WHEN YOU STOOD UP
SO HERE WE HAVE THE RESULTS FROM YOUR ECG AND BLOOD PRESSURE TEST

IN A NORMAL CASE, THE NERVOUS SYSTEM WOULD REACT TO KEEP SUCH A REACTION FROM SHOWING
ばたばたばた
FIRST THE ECG
WHEN YOU'RE STANDING UP THE WAVES FLUCTUATE TO BECOME SLIGHTLY LOWER THAN BEFORE
ON THE OTHER HAND WITH YOUR HEART RATE THERE'S THE OPPOSITE PROBLEM NORMALLY IT SHOULD CONSTANTLY BE SHIFTING ACCORDING TO THE STATE OF YOUR BODY AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT.
BUT WITH YOU, MS. SOMA, YOUR HEART RATE STAYS EXACTLY THE SAME EVEN AS YOU GET TO YOUR FEET
AND AS FOR YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE, BOTH YOUR MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM PRESSURE LEVELS FALL WHEN YOU'RE STANDING
THIS IS ALSO DUE TO A MALFUNCTION IN THE AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM, AND LEADS TO SYMPTOMS SUCH AS SUDDEN DIZZY SPELLS OR EVEN FAINTING

IS MS SOMA STILL ON HER BREAK?
YES, SHE'S DUE TO BE BACK TOMORROW
AH, DO COME IN
EXCUSE ME
I CAME TO RETURN YOUR BOOK
It CAN be treated! AUTONOMIC IMBALANCE
OH, THANK YOU

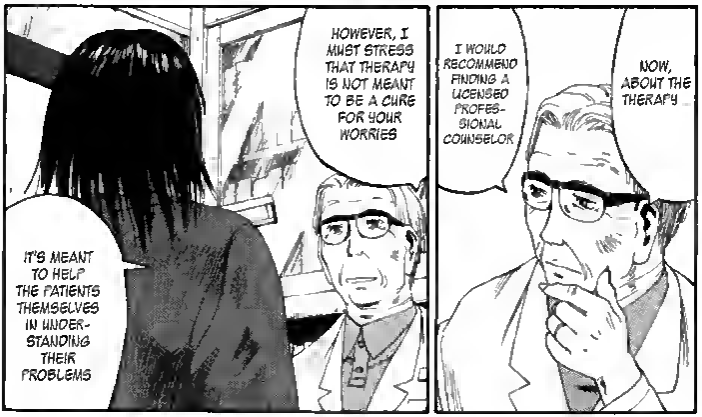
AND TO BE FRANK, I'M NOT GOOD AT TALKING TO YOUNG WOMEN ANYMORE
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
HONESTLY, IF YOU HAD A BOOK LIKE THIS, YOU COULD HAVE JUST TOLD HER YOURSELF
I FEEL LIKE IT WOULD JUST COME OFF AS SCOLDING, COMING FROM HER BOSS
AH, YOUR FRIEND FROM COLLEGE?
I'M NOT TANIYAMA, YOU SEE
OF COURSE YOU DIDN'T, SIR.♡
I DIDN'T MEAN IT LIKE THAT
Does this count as sexual harassment
DON'T WORRY SOON SHE'LL BE BACK AND THE OFFICE WILL BE YOUNGER FOR IT
OH COME TO THINK OF IT, I'M ALREADY FORTY, AREN'T I? A REGULAR OLD BIDDY

YES
DO YOU FOLLOW SO FAR?
IN OTHER WORDS, YES, YOU ARE SUFFERING FROM AUTONOMIC IMBALANCE
THAT'S WHY WE GAVE YOU THOSE PSYCH TESTS TO TRY AND DISCERN YOUR STRESS LEVELS AS WELL AS YOUR CHARACTERISTICS AND TENDENCIES
OF COURSE
OF COURSE THEY CAN'T TELL US EVERYTHING BUT THESE TESTS DO LET US SEE GENERAL TRENDS AT LEAST
NOW, AS I SAID EARLIER, MENTAL STATE HAS A HUGE IMPACT ON VULNERABILITY TO AUTONOMIC IMBALANCE
HOW-EVER
YOUR TEST RESULTS INDICATE THAT YOU HAVE AN AMAZINGLY RESILIENT AND ROBUST TEMPERAMENT
BUT IF WE TAKE A LOOK AT THESE TEST RESULTS
IT'S READILY APPARENT THAT YOU AREN'T THE TYPE TO BE EASILY UN-BALANCED MS SOMA

MENTALLY STRONG INDIVIDUALS LIKE YOURSELF HAVE THE TENDENCY TO KEEP THEIR PROBLEMS TO THEMSELVES
YOU'VE INDICATED THAT THERE'S SOMETHING YOU'RE STRUGGLING WITH,
AND IT'S MY OPINION THAT PERHAPS THIS PROBLEM HAS FINALLY GROWN BEYOND YOUR ABILITY TO HANDLE
YOU'RE VERY RESILIENT, YES,
BUT YOUR STRESS LEVELS RIGHT NOW ARE STILL WORRYING
BUT AS I ALREADY MENTIONED, YOU'RE AN EXTRAORDINARILY TOUGH INDIVIDUAL,
AND YOU'VE INDICATED THAT YOU KNOW THE CAUSE OF YOUR STRESS,
SO I PREDICT YOU'LL BE BACK TO NORMAL IN NO TIME

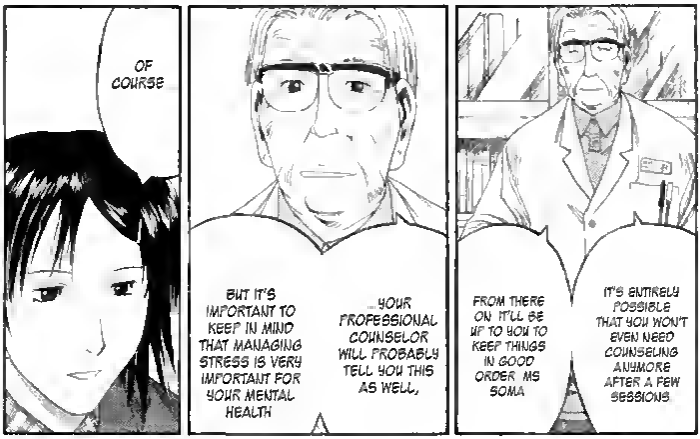
RIGHT...
SO, UMM...
IT IS AUTONOMIC IMBALANCE, THEN?
YES
THAT IS THE DIAGNOSIS
I SEE
JUST KNOWING THAT RELIEVES ME A LITTLE
A COMMON REACTION. IT'S EASY TO GROW MORE WORRIED WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR OWN BODY
NOW, FOR THE TREAT-MENT...

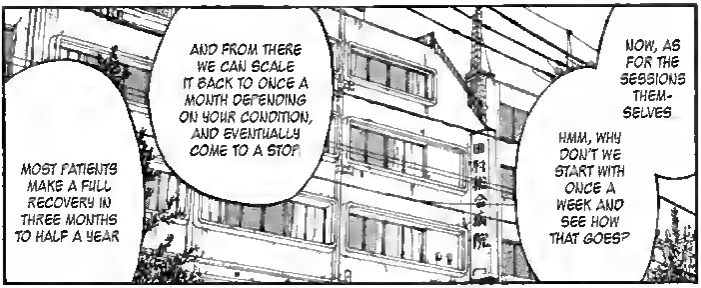
IN CASES LIKE YOURS, I'VE FOUND THAT A COMBINATION OF MEDICINE AND THERAPY IS MOST EFFECTIVE
FIRST WE'LL PRESCRIBE YOU SOME MEDICATION TO REIGN IN THE SYMPTOMS YOU'VE BEEN EXPERIENCING
THAT WILL PUT A STOP TO ANY POTENTIAL CYCLES OF BODILY PAIN FEEDING INTO MENTAL DISTRESS AND VICE VERSA
BREATHING EXERCISES AND MEDITATION HAVE BEEN SHOWN TO BE QUITE EFFECTIVE, SO I'LL EXPECT YOU TO DO SOME OF THOSE AS WELL

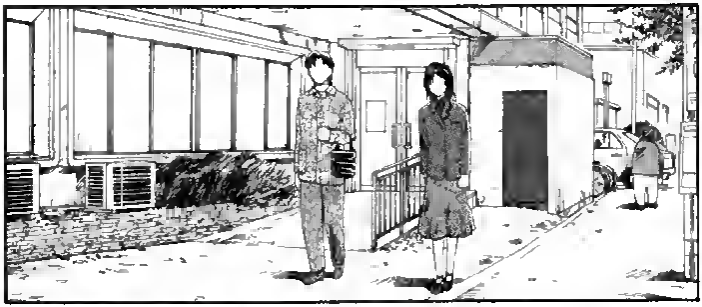

NOW, ABOUT THE THERAPY...
I WOULD RECOMMEND FINDING A LICENSED PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR
HOWEVER, I MUST STRESS THAT THERAPY IS NOT MEANT TO BE A CURE FOR YOUR WORRIES
IT'S MEANT TO HELP THE PATIENTS THEMSELVES IN UNDERSTANDING THEIR PROBLEMS

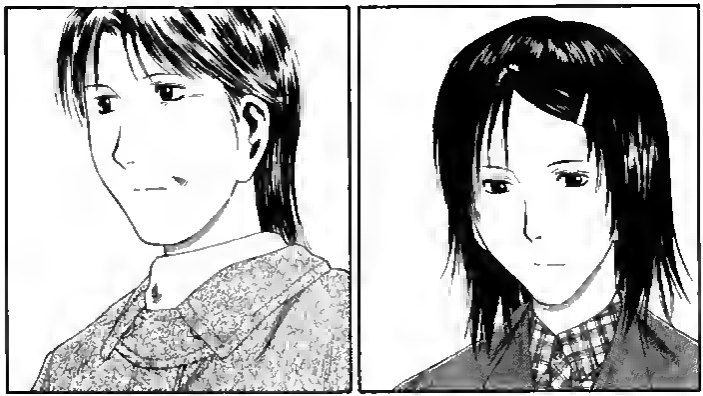
ONCE THAT'S ACHIEVED, EVEN A MENTAL ILLNESS CAN BE SAID TO BE "CURED"
AND FROM THAT UNDERSTANDING, IT AIMS TO ENCOURAGE POSITIVE THINKING PATTERNS IN THE PATIENT

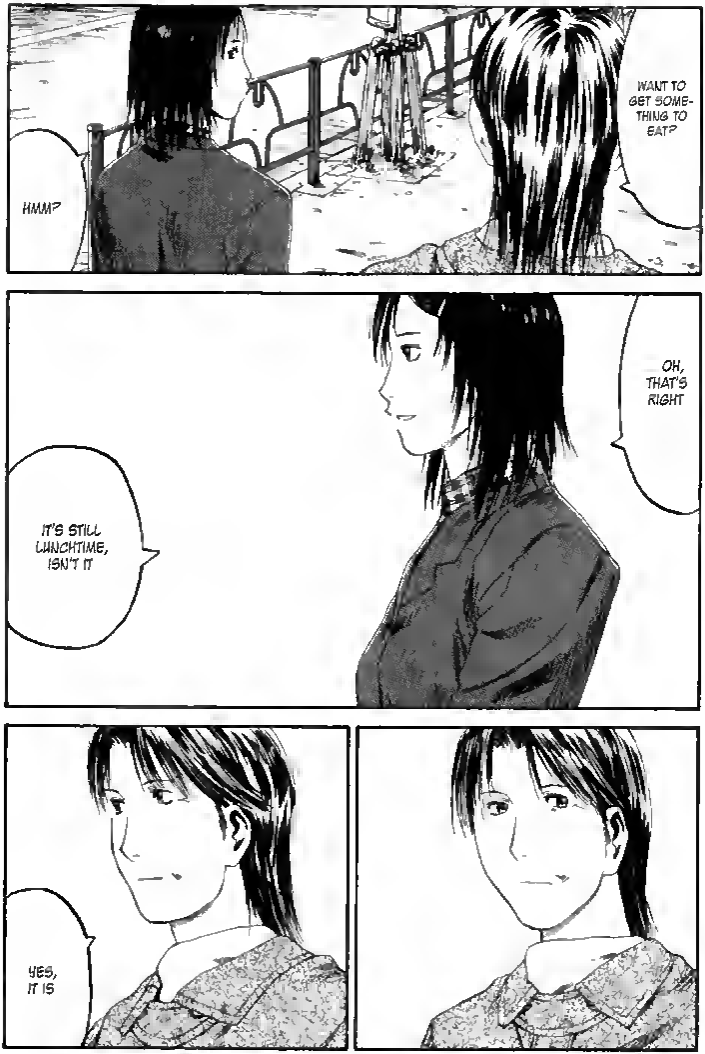
...BUT EVEN RECOGNIZING THE ROOT OF YOUR PROBLEM IS AN ENORMOUS STEP TOWARD RECOVERY
OF COURSE, YOU SHOULD FIX WHAT CAN BE FIXED
IT'S NOT NECESSARY TO TOTALLY DO AWAY WITH WHATEVER IS WORRYING YOU


OF COURSE
BUT IT'S IMPORTANT TO KEEP IN MIND THAT MANAGING STRESS IS VERY IMPORTANT FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH
...YOUR PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR WILL PROBABLY TELL YOU THIS AS WELL,
FROM THERE ON IT'LL BE UP TO YOU TO KEEP THINGS IN GOOD ORDER, MS SOMA
IT'S ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT YOU WON'T EVEN NEED COUNSELING ANYMORE AFTER A FEW SESSIONS

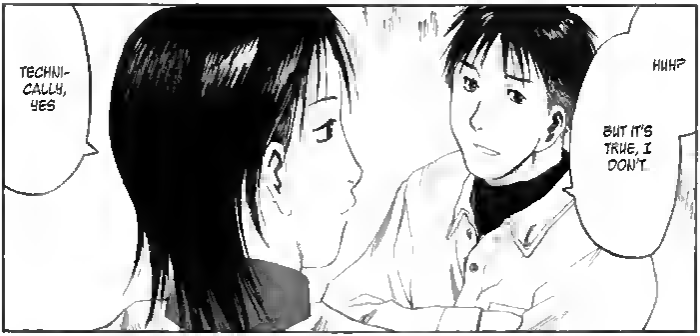

MOST PATIENTS MAKE A FULL RECOVERY IN THREE MONTHS TO HALF A YEAR
AND FROM THERE WE CAN SCALE IT BACK TO ONCE A MONTH DEPENDING ON YOUR CONDITION, AND EVENTUALLY COME TO A STOP
HMM, WHY DON'T WE START WITH ONCE A WEEK AND SEE HOW THAT GOES?
NOW, AS FOR THE SESSIONS THEM-SELVES

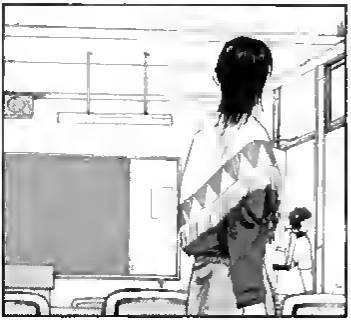


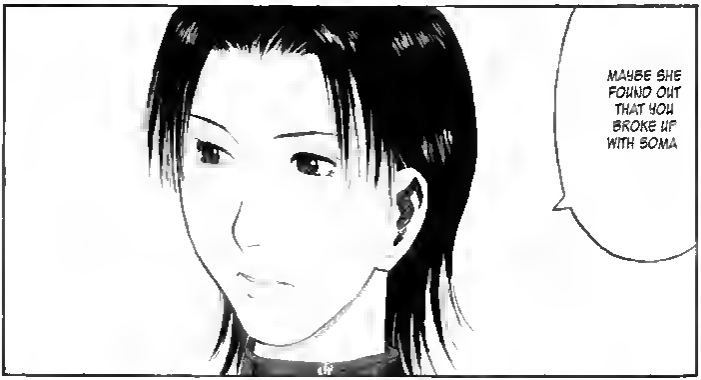


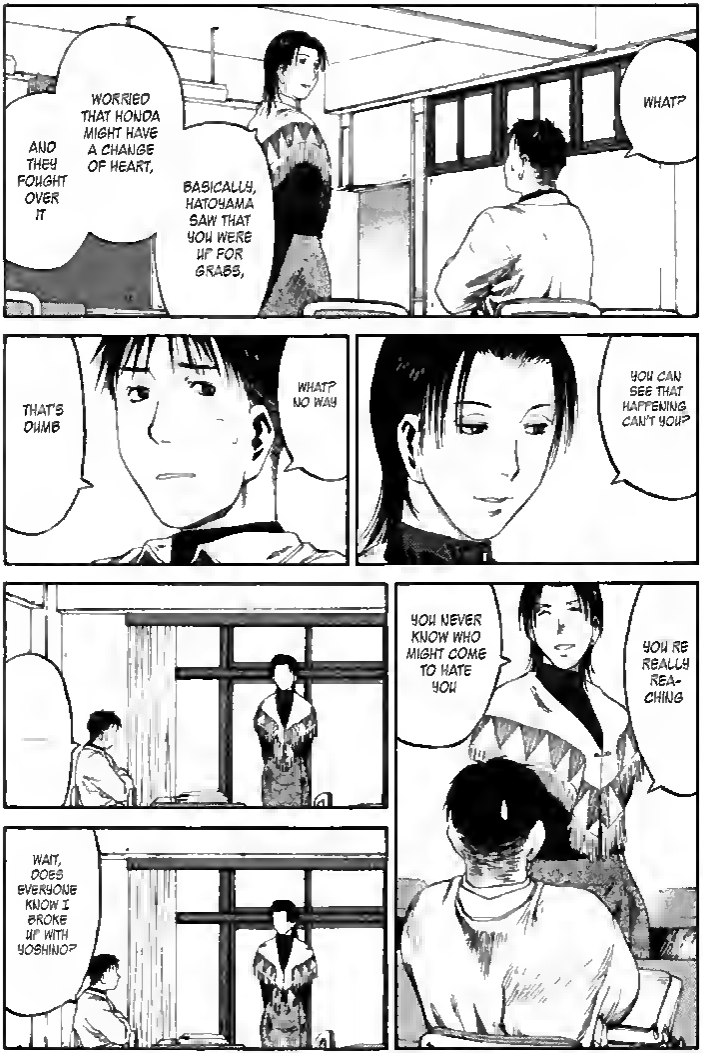

HMM?
WANT TO GET SOMETHING TO EAT?
OH, THAT'S RIGHT
IT'S STILL LUNCHTIME, ISN'T IT
YES, IT IS

A CURSE, EH?
I THINK YOU CAST THAT ONE A LITTLE TOO STRONG, IF YOU ASK ME...
DON'T ACT LIKE YOU'VE GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS.


TECHNI-
CALLY,
YES
HUH?
BUT IT'S
TRUE, I
DON'T.




MAYBE SHE
FOUND OUT
THAT YOU
BROKE UP
WITH SOMA

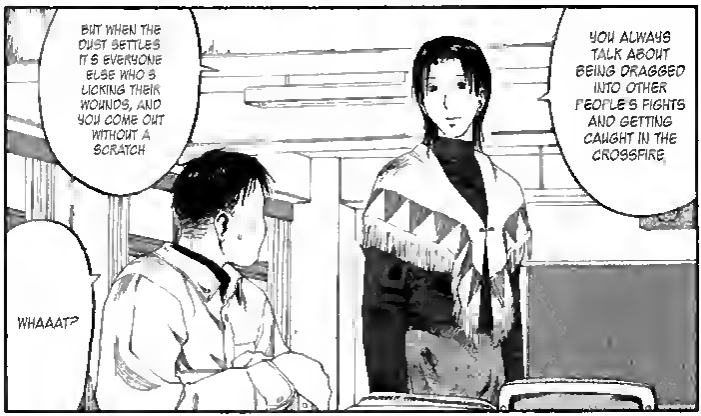

WHAT?
BASICALLY, HATOYAMA SAW THAT YOU WERE UP FOR GRABS,
WORRIED THAT HONDA MIGHT HAVE A CHANGE OF HEART,
AND THEY FOUGHT OVER IT
WHAT? NO WAY
THAT'S DUMB
YOU CAN SEE THAT HAPPENING CAN'T YOU?
YOU'RE REALLY REACHING
YOU NEVER KNOW WHO MIGHT COME TO HATE YOU
WAIT, DOES EVERYONE KNOW I BROKE UP WITH YOSHINO?

SO WHO'D YOU HEAR IT FROM, THEN?
WELL, YEAH
I DON'T KNOW
BUT MOST OF THEM PROBABLY DON'T CARE ENOUGH TO FIND OUT
WHAAAT
I JUST REMEMBERED YOU SAID YOU WERE LOOKING FOR A JOB IN KISARAZU
NO-BODY
SO YOU PRETTY MUCH GUESSED?
OH COME ON, THAT'S A GUESS TOO
ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO THINGS LIKE THIS
SOMETIMES A GUESS IS ENOUGH
IS IT?

WELL, NOBODY KNOWS FOR SURE EXCEPT THOSE TWO
WHO KNOWS, MAYBE THEY DIDN'T EVEN FIGHT AT ALL MAYBE HONDA GOT INTO SOME KINDA ACCIDENT
AS LONG AS THEY DON'T BRING ME INTO IT, THEY CAN DO WHATEVER THE HELL THEY WANT TO EACH OTHER
HAHA
THAT WAS COLD
OH, REALLY? You think?
THIS'S HOW I'VE ALWAYS BEEN
I'M TOO DUMB TO CARE
DON'T ASK TOO MUCH FROM ME
HAHAHA

YOU MIGHT BE PLAYING THE VICTIM HERE
BUT YOU'RE ACTUALLY THE LIVELIEST ONE OF US ALL

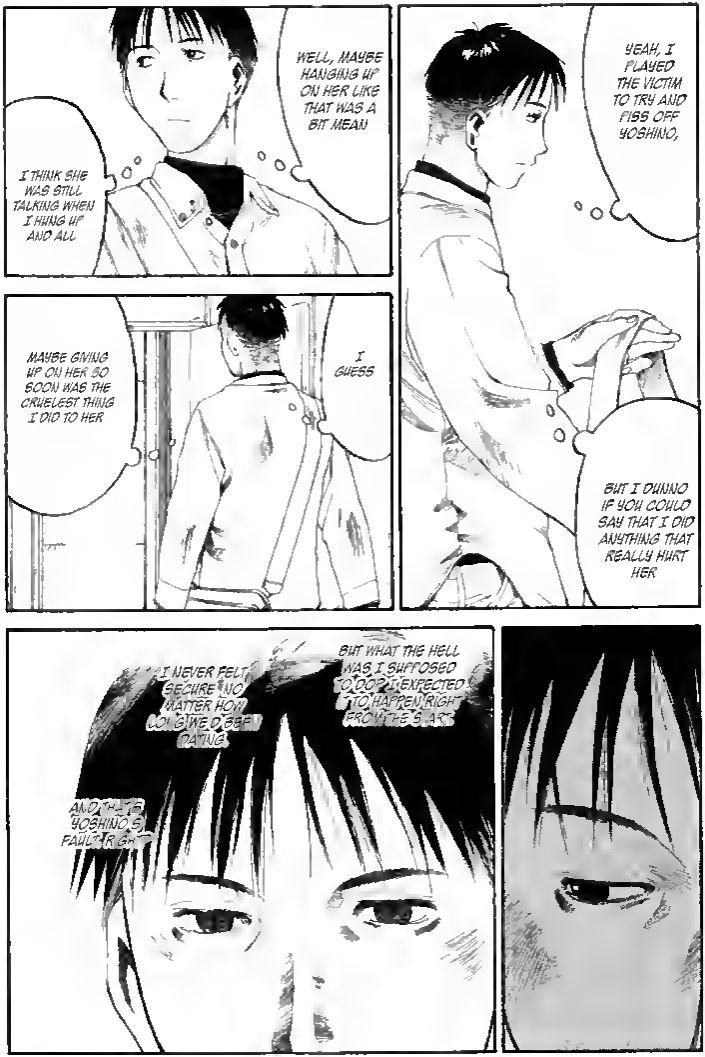
HUH? WHAT'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT NOW?
DON'T YOU THINK IT'S STRANGE?


YOU ALWAYS TALK ABOUT BEING DRAGGED INTO OTHER PEOPLE'S FIGHTS AND GETTING CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE
BUT WHEN THE DUST SETTLES IT'S EVERYONE ELSE WHO'S LICKING THEIR WOUNDS, AND YOU COME OUT WITHOUT A SCRATCH
WHAAAT?

IT JUST MAKES ME A LITTLE MAD, THAT'S ALL
I DIDN'T SAY IT WAS
LOOK, THAT AIN'T MY FAULT
.....
THEN WHY DON'T WE TALK ABOUT YOUR PROBLEM?
GO AHEAD AND GET MAD ALL YOU WANT. IT STILL AIN'T MY PROBLEM
STILL A FAST RECOVERY. HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN? A MONTH? TWO?
WELL IT'S BEEN A WHILE, OKAY?
HUH?
YOU JUST BROKE UP WITH SOMA, BUT NOBODY WOULD BE ABLE TO TELL BY LOOKING AT YOU

...WHAT THE HELL'S GOTTEN INTO YOU?
WHAT'S WITH THE SUDDEN INTERR-OGATION?
WHAT, ARE YOU GONNA PUT A CURSE ON ME, THIS TIME?
HELL, CURSE AWAY. CAN'T BE SCARIER THAN BEING HERE ALONE WITH YOU.
IMAGINE IF HATOYAMA SAW US AND GOT THE WRONG IDEA, YOU KNOW?

HEY, I DIDN'T MEAN IT LIKE THAT
OKAY THEN, I'LL LEAVE ♡
HUH?
WELL, TO BE HONEST THAT'S FINE WITH ME


I THINK SHE WAS STILL TALKING WHEN I HUNG UP AND ALL
WELL, MAYBE HANGING UP ON HER LIKE THAT WAS A BIT MEAN
MAYBE GIVING UP ON HER SO SOON WAS THE CRUELEST THING I DID TO HER
I GUESS
YEAH, I PLAYED THE VICTIM TO TRY AND FISS OFF YOSHINO.
BUT I DUNNO IF YOU COULD SAY THAT I DID ANYTHING THAT REALLY HURT HER
I NEVER FELT SECURE NO MATTER HOW LONG WE DATED.
BUT WHAT THE HELL WAS I SUPPOSED TO DO? I EXPECTED IT TO HAPPEN RIGHT FROM THE START.
AND IT'S ALL YOSHINO'S FAULT FOR--

YEAH, DEFI-NITELY...
IF SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH HER RIGHT NOW, IT'S PROBABLY BECAUSE OF THAT HASEGAWA GUY, RIGHT?
HELL, WHAT COULD I EVER DO TO HURT SOME-ONE LIKE YOSHINO, ANYWAY?
AIN'T LIKE SHE EVER CARED ABOUT ME ANY-

HEY!
WHAT'RE YOU
I DON'T LIKE THE WAY YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO'S NOT WORRIED ABOUT ANYTHING

WHA...
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...HAHAHA
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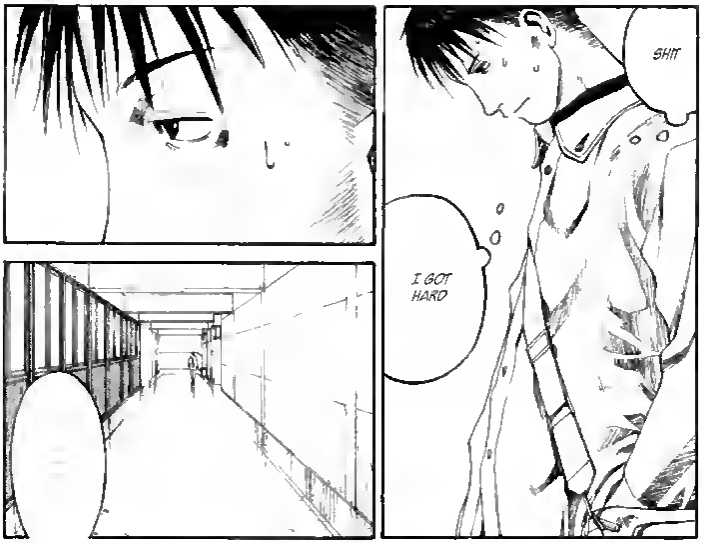
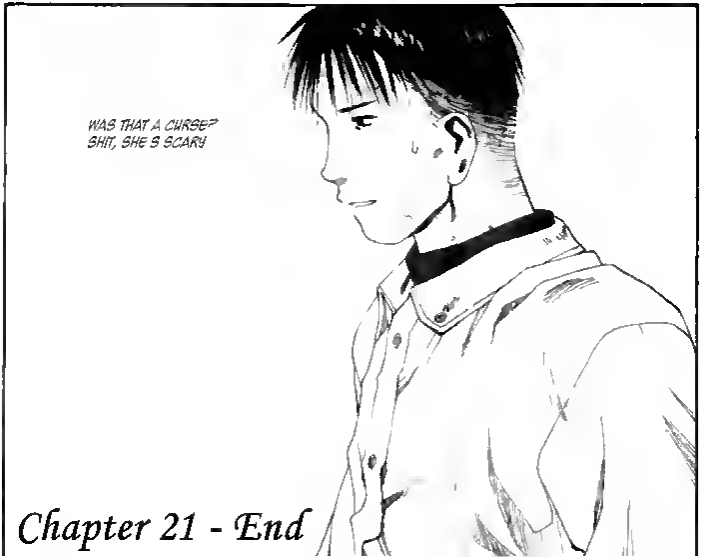
WHAT THE FUCK
WAS THAT





Chapter 21 - End

Chapter 22 - Witch I

A fire broke out
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Shinjuku.
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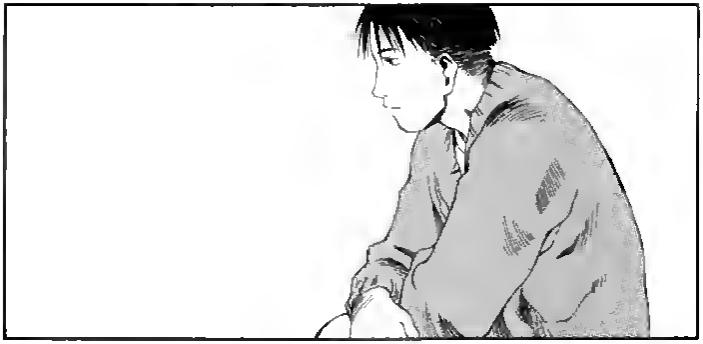
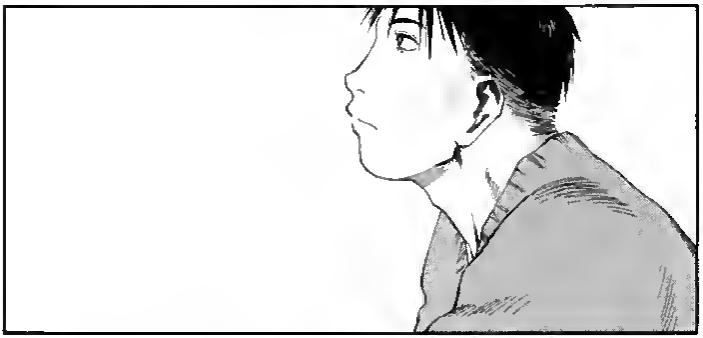
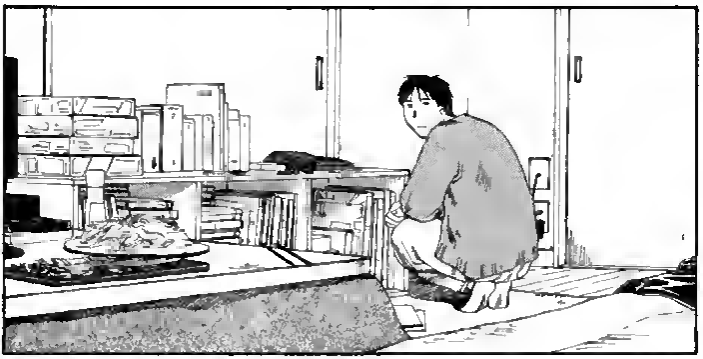
H'LO?
OH! UMM HELLO
YES YES OF COURSE I REMEMBER THANK YOU AGAIN FOR GIVING ME THE INTER-VIEW
MHMM
RIGHT

NEXT WEEK GOT IT
MHMM
RIGHT
OF COURSE THANK YOU SO MUCH
RIGHT
I'LL BE THERE
OKAY
ちゃ







WELP, LOOKS LIKE I'M GONNA BE IN KISARAZU FOR A WHILE
I should call mom and dad

COME IN, DOOR'S OPEN
かちゃこん
WHERE'S THE PROFESSOR?
HE STEPPED OUT FOR A SECOND BATHROOM
OH, HELLO THERE
HEY

OH OKAY
HE'LL BE BACK SOON YOU CAN COME IN AND WAIT FOR HIM
YEAH, YEAH
Thank god you're here
The bathroom was freezing
I'M COLD, MOVE IT
OH, IF IT ISN'T MR SHIMA
OH, HEY
THAT'S GREAT!
OH! REALLY!
SO, WHAT IS IT TODAY?
IT'S THIS TRANSPORT INTERMEDIARY COMPANY CALLED HAMANO OPTIONAL
SO WHAT'S THE JOB?
WELL JUST THOUGHT I'D DROP BY AND TELL YOU, I GOT A JOB

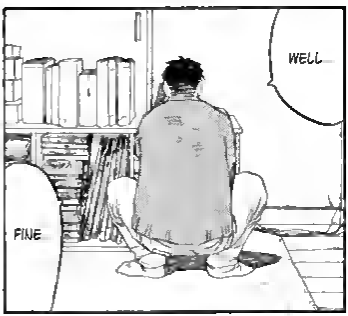
THOUGH THESE DAYS THE CLIENTS ARE ALMOST ALL REALLY SMALL COMPANIES
YEAH, GUESS SO.
THE ECONOMY HASN'T BEEN KIND, HAS IT
SO IT'S LIKE A COURIER SERVICE?
KINDA, EXCEPT FOR OTHER COMPANIES INSTEAD OF PEOPLE
SO YOU'LL BE STAYING HERE IN KISARAZU, HMM.
YEAH
Six years in the town, eh?
C'mon don't count 'em like that

CAN I COME OVER RIGHT NOW?
HUH? WHY?
TO CELEBRATE YOUR SUCCESSFUL JOB SEARCH, OF COURSE
BUT I BOUGHT A CAKE AND I'M ALREADY HEADING THAT WAY.
UHH
FUCK CELLPHONES, MAN
YOU MEAN "CURSE," RIGHT?
NAH, IT'S FINE, IT'S REALLY NOT THAT BIG A DEAL ANYWAY

OKAY
ERR...
OH COME ON, STOP AVOIDING ME. I WANTED TO APOLOGIZE FOR BEING NASTY TO YOU BACK THEN, TOO

I'LL JUST DROP BY AND BE IN AND OUT IN NO TIME, PROMISE

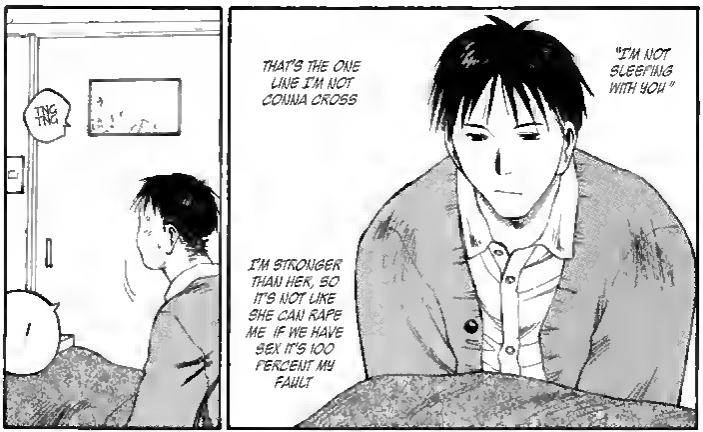
IT'S NOT LIKE I'M ASKING YOU TO DRINK WITH ME OR ANYTHING. IT'S JUST CAKE


WELL...
FINE

FOR SOME REASON IT FEELS LIKE SHE'S ALREADY DECLARED WAR ON ME...
BLAH
DON'T TELL ME SHE'S ON ONE OF THOSE "GOTTA GET A BOYFRIEND BEFORE CHRISTMAS" PLEDGES
WELL, I ADMIT, SHE'S PRETTY HOT I CAN'T DENY I'M NOT INTERESTED IN HAVING SEX WITH HER
Hell, I've jerked off to her a few times already
BUT I DON'T FEEL ANYTHING FOR HER OUTSIDE OF THAT. SHE'S HOT, NOTHING LESS AND NOTHING MORE
WHAT'S IN IT FOR HER, WHY'S SHE BEING SO FRIENDLY WITH ME?
HELL, I CAN'T GET A HANDLE ON WHAT'S GOING ON IN HER HEAD
MORE THAN ANYTHING I REALLY DON'T WANNA GET INVOLVED IN THAT FUCKING CRAZY LOVE TRIANGLE

YOSHIMURA'S GOT THAT VIBE AROUND HER. IT FEELS LIKE IF SHE WAS GONNA DIE, SHE'D TRY AND TAKE OUT AS MANY OTHER PEOPLE WITH HER AS SHE COULD
SHE'S DANGEROUS...

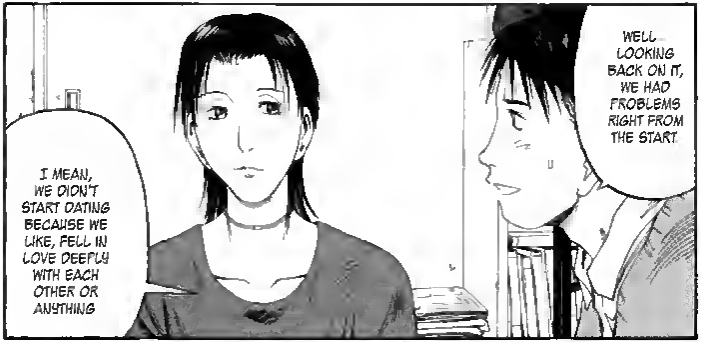
MAYBE I'M OVERTHINKING THIS. MAYBE I'M JUST TOTALLY WRONG
I'LL HAVE TO MAKE MYSELF CLEAR...


"I'M NOT SLEEPING WITH YOU"
THAT'S THE ONE LINE I'M NOT GONNA CROSS
I'M STRONGER THAN HER, SO IT'S NOT LIKE SHE CAN RAPE ME. IF WE HAVE SEX IT'S 100 PERCENT MY FAULT
TING TING
!

CONGRATULATIONS ON THE JOB!
YEAH, THANKS
HI.
WHICH DO YOU WANT, MILLE-FEUILLE OR CHEESECAKE WITH ORANGE GLAZE?
WHICHEVER
WANT SOME TEA?
PERFUME, HUH?
HMM
COULDN'T TELL WHEN WE MET ON CAMPUS

HAHA, WELL, THANK YOU, MS YOSHIMURA
SO, TO BE A BIT MORE FORMAL... MR. SHIMA I OFFER YOU MY MOST SINCERE CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR NEW JOB
I GUESS I'M PRETTY USED TO THE JOB HUNT BY NOW,
BUT YEAH, THAT DOESN'T MEAN I MISS IT NOW THAT IT'S OVER
IT'S A BIG LOAD OFF OF YOUR CHEST, HUH?
BUT REALLY, THAT'S GREAT
BUT WHY'RE YOU STAYING IN KISARAZU?
YEAH, I GUESS
HMM...
HMM? WELL, I'M USED TO IT HERE, AND THE RENT'S PRETTY CHEAP

I THOUGHT YOU WOULDN'T LIKE IT HERE. DOESN'T THIS PLACE REMIND YOU OF SOMA?
HMM?
HERE IT COMES
NAH, NOT REALLY I DON'T HAVE MANY BAD MEMORIES ABOUT HER
HUH?
IF THAT WAS TRUE YOU WOULDN'T HAVE BROKEN UP WITH HER
THERE HAS TO BE A REASON YOU TWO BROKE UP


I MEAN, WE DIDN'T START DATING BECAUSE WE LIKE, FELL IN LOVE DEEPLY WITH EACH OTHER OR ANYTHING
WELL LOOKING BACK ON IT, WE HAD PROBLEMS RIGHT FROM THE START

AND THEN THE CRACKS STARTED TO REALLY SHOW ONCE WE STARTED LIVING APART,
AND THEN YEAH, WE JUST KINDA BROKE UP
WE KINDA HAD A ROCKY RELATION-SHIP EVEN WHEN WE WERE BOTH HERE,

TO BE HONEST I'M A LITTLE SURPRISED AT HOW SIMPLE IT IS TO EXPLAIN IN HINDSIGHT
HAHAHA
THAT'S IT I GUESS
NOTHING MUCH EITHER OF US COULD REALLY DO ABOUT IT

SORRY, I'M REALLY WEIRD, AREN'T I?
THAT'S JUST THE WAY I AM, I CAN'T HELP IT. I'M NOT TRYING TO BE MEAN OR ANYTHING
HUH REALLY?
HMM...
SO THAT'S HOW IT WAS...
REALLY
LIKE THAT THING I SAID TO YOU A WHILE AGO...
THAT PROBABLY REALLY CONFUSED YOU. I'M SORRY
REALLY? WELL, IF YOU SAY SO...
YEAH
WATER UNDER THE BRIDGE AND ALL
EH...
IT'S FINE, I GUESS

YOU KNOW WHAT?
I KIND OF FEEL LIKE RUNNING MY MOUTH IS WHAT GETS ME INTO TROUBLE
YEAH, I CAN SEE THAT
I JUST SORT OF CAUSE CONFLICT, DON'T I?
RIGHT?
I'VE ALWAYS BEEN LIKE THIS, REALLY
I CAN'T SEEM TO STOP DOING THINGS THAT RUB PEOPLE THE WRONG WAY
REMEMBER WHAT I SAID TO YOU ABOUT PEOPLE AROUND YOU GETTING HURT? I THINK I KIND OF MEANT MYSELF TOO
IN MY CASE, IT'S ME HURTING THE PEOPLE AROUND ME
BUT I'M A LITTLE DIFFERENT, AKIO
THEY SAY YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW, RIGHT? WELL, I'M REALLY REAPING RIGHT NOW.

OOH
I FEEL REALLY BAD ABOUT WHAT I'VE DONE TO HATOYAMA AND HONDA
SNFF
OOOH
HOOH

DID MY MASCARA SMEAR?
IF IT DID I CAN'T TELL
OH!
I JUST SUDDENLY COULDN'T KEEP IT IN
OH MY GOSH, I'M SO SORRY
MMM
I GUESS I'VE GOTTEN SENTIMENTAL IN MY OLD AGE

WHAT DO YOU THINK?
HUH?
DO YOU THINK I MAKE THE PEOPLE AROUND ME UNHAPPY?
MMM
YOU KINDA HAVE A KNACK FOR SENSING WHEN PEOPLE ARE HURTING AND JUST SNIPING AT THEM
WELL, THAT'S DEFINITELY SOMETHING I'VE NOTICED, YEAH
AND HELL, MOST OF US ARE BOUND TO BE HAVING TROUBLE AT SOME POINT OR OTHER,
SO YOU CAN SEE HOW THAT'D MAKE YOU SORT OF UNPOPULAR

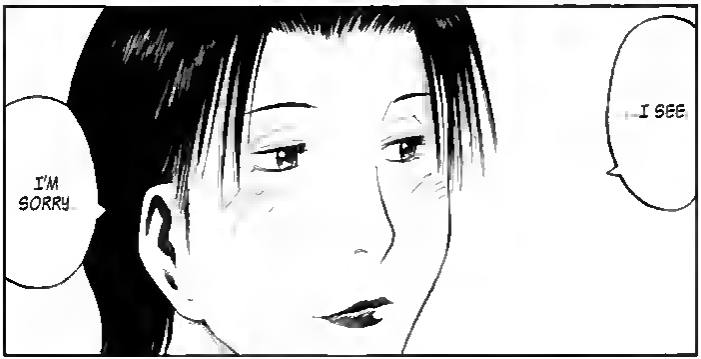
BUT ON THE OTHER HAND,
I GUESS PEOPLE LIKE THAT'RE UNHAPPY ANYWAY, SO IT'S NOT LIKE YOU'RE REALLY MAKING A BIG CHANGE
THAT'S A STRANGE WAY TO COMFORT SOMEONE
HUH REALLY?
I MEAN, I WASN'T REALLY TRYING TO COMFORT YOU OR ANYTHING
HAHAHA
HUH?
NORMALLY IN THIS SORT OF SITUATION, YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO SAY, "NO, OF COURSE NOT," AREN'T YOU?
HEY, AKIO

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IN?
HUH...?
DO YOU BELIEVE IN WORDS?
IN WHAT YOUR BODY TELLS YOU?
IN CONFLICT?

ERR...
WELL...
HMM...

I DON'T BELIEVE IN WORDS
AND AS FOR MY BODY
WELL, I GUESS I DON'T BELIEVE IN WHAT IT TELLS ME, EITHER
I DON'T KNOW

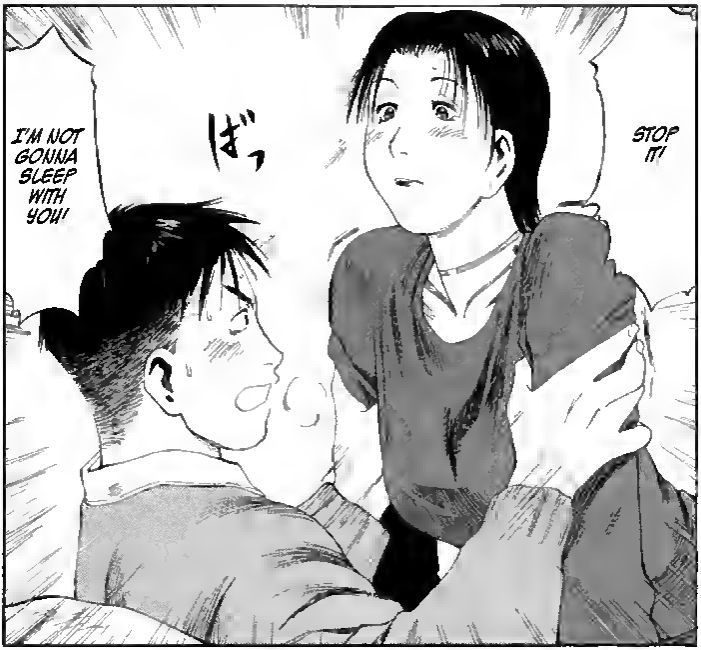
I DON'T KNOW WHAT I BELIEVE IN
I THINK THAT'S WHY I BROKE UP WITH YOSHINO

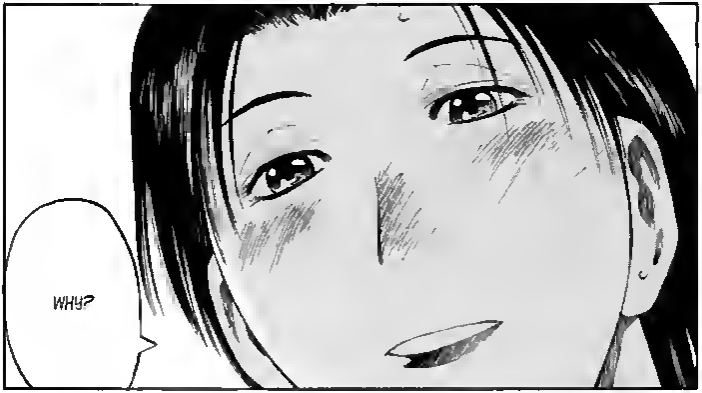

I SEE
I'M SORRY

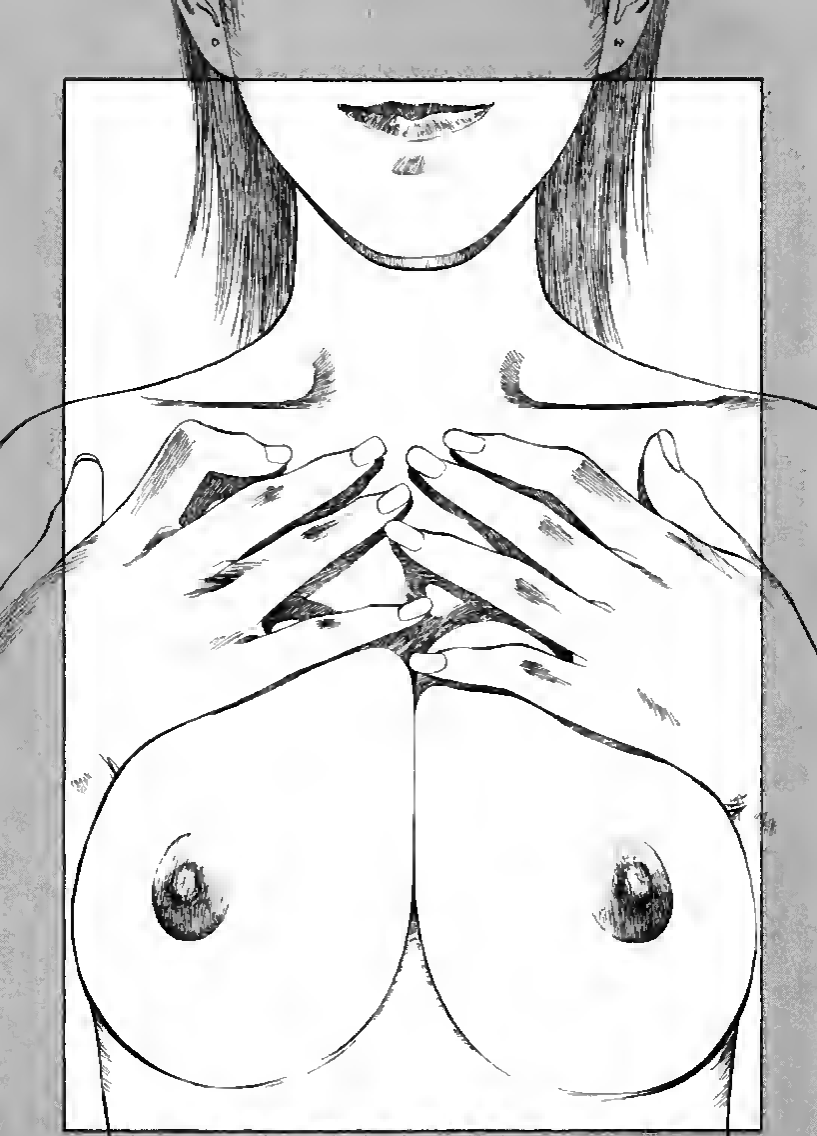
I JUST THOUGHT YOU MIGHT KNOW
HUH?
WELL, YOU'RE ALWAYS SO CALM, LIKE YOU DON'T HAVE A CARE IN THE WORLD
YOU FEEL STABLE I GUESS
HAHA, YOU'RE SO WRONG ABOUT THAT. You have no idea.
YOU HAVEN'T EVEN BATTED AN EYELASH AT ME TRYING TO SEDUCE YOU
WAIT, YOU WERE TRYING TO SEDUCE ME?
SEE? YOU DIDN'T EVEN NOTICE
MOST PEOPLE WILL TRY AND GET CLOSE TO ME WITH ANY EXCUSE THEY CAN THINK OF.
Hah

HAHA
Well that's them and I'm me
I WANT YOU TO FUCK ME, AKIO

YOU DON'T WANT TO?
WHA
WHAT THE HELL'S GOTTEN INTO YOU?!
HOLY SHIT HER TONGUE IS REALLY LONG
HO
....
ㅋㅋ

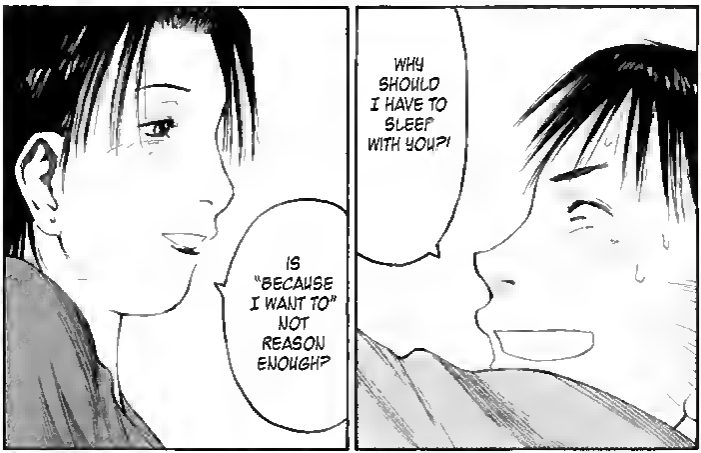

I'M NOT GONNA SLEEP WITH YOU!
ばっ
STOP IT!


WHY?



Chapter 23 - The Form Seduction Takes

WHY?
THAT'S WHAT I WANNA KNOW


WHY SHOULD I HAVE TO SLEEP WITH YOU?!
IS "BECAUSE I WANT TO" NOT REASON ENOUGH?

WOULD A SUPERFICIAL FLING REALLY SATISFY YOU, YOSHIMURA?!
HUH?
HUH?
WHAT?
NEXT YOU'RE GOING TO START LECTURING ME ABOUT BEAUTY ONLY BEING SKIN DEEP OR SOMETHING, AREN'T YOU?
WHAT?
HMM

YOU'RE ACTUALLY A CLOSET PERVERT, AREN'T YOU, AKIO?
I'M SAYING PEOPLE LIKE YOU THINK TOO MUCH.
WHAT?
WHAT? WHY?
YOU'RE THE KIND OF PERSON WHO BELIEVES THEY CAN SOLVE EVERYTHING BY THINKING IT OUT IN THEIR HEAD.
LOOK, I'M NOT LIKE THAT
HAH

WHOA!
Hands off the goods!
AND YOU'RE TELLING ME YOU DON'T HAVE A DIRTY MIND?
LIAR LOOK AT HOW HARD YOU ARE
OH? LOOK WHO'S JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS
IT'S NOT LIKE YOU REALLY LOVE ME OR ANYTHING
HELL, YOSHIMURA
BUT
FINE YEAH, I'M A PERV YEAH, I'M HARD AS A ROCK RIGHT NOW

I TOLD YOU, YOU THINK ABOUT THINGS IN YOUR HEAD TOO MUCH
IT'S NOT LIKE I'D SLEEP WITH JUST ANYONE
BUT I'M WILLING TO DO IT WITH YOU, AKIO
I'M NOT GOING TO BLACKMAIL YOU WITH A CHILD OR ANYTHING
AND I'M NOT TRYING TO START A RELATION-SHIP OFF OF IT, EITHER
IT'S JUST

I'M REALLY HORNY RIGHT NOW, OKAY?
YOU KNOW,
I'M REALLY WET DOWN THERE
I DON'T WANT TO RUIN MY PANTIES MIND IF I TAKE THEM OFF?

GET A GRIP ON YOURSELF, AKIO!
SHIT SHIT SHIT! I WASN'T READY FOR THIS!
がし
WHAT?
I'M SORRY, BUT I ALREADY TOLD YOU I DON'T BELIEVE IN WHAT MY BODY TELLS ME, EITHER.
HAHAH
YOU THOUGHT YOU'D JUST OFFER YOUR BODY TO ME AND I'D FALL FOR IT, HUH.

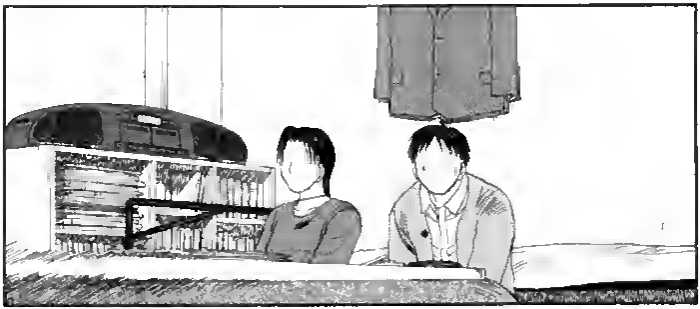
SHIT, SHE'S GOOD
YOU CAN'T TRICK SOMEONE WITH SOMETHING YOU DON'T EVEN BELIEVE IN, AKIO
YEAH, BUT THOSE ARE JUST WORDS
YOU CAN'T CONVINCE ME TO STOP WITH THAT
HEY, LOOK! I JUST...
I JUST DON'T WANT HATOYAMA'S SLOPPY SECONDS, OKAY?!

YOU REALLY ARE A BLUNT ONE
YEAH, I CAN UNDERSTAND WHERE YOU'RE COMING FROM WITH THAT ONE

Y-YEAH
BESIDES, I KNOW YOU THREE ARE STILL AT ODDS WITH EACH OTHER
LET'S NOT TALK ABOUT IT, OKAY?
I DON'T WANNA BE DRAGGED INTO WHAT-EVER SHIT YOU GUYS HAVE GOT GOING ON
NAH, I THINK WE SHOULD
I DIDN'T WANT TO HEAR THAT FROM YOU
IT'S OKAY
WE'RE GRADUATING SOON, ANYWAY
WE ONLY NEED TO ENDURE IT FOR THREE MORE MONTHS AND WE'LL NEVER HAVE TO SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN
THAT'S WHAT ALL THREE OF US ARE THINKING

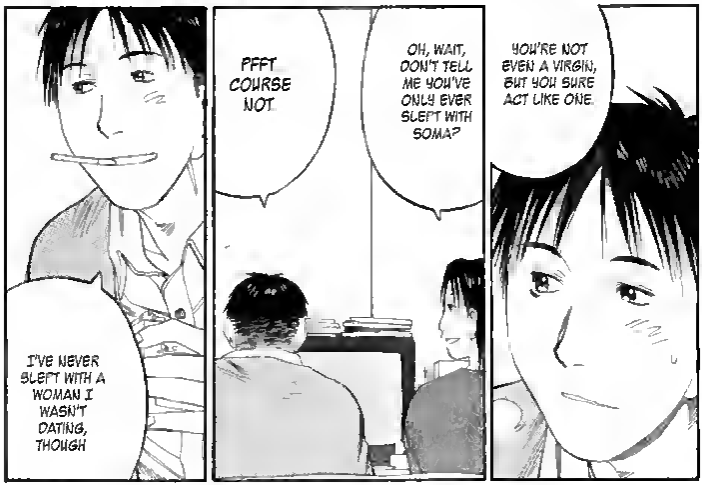
WE'LL ALL BE LEAVING KISARAZU, ANYWAY.
THEN THAT'S ALL THE MORE REA-SON...
...YOU SHOULDN'T DO ANY-THING STUPID, DAMMIT
YOU NEED TO STOP DOING THIS SHIT.
YOU'RE HOMING IN ON SOMEONE IN TROUBLE AND TRYING TO MAKE IT WORSE, JUST LIKE ALWAYS
YOU KNOW THAT BETTER THAN ANYBODY.

.....
YOU'RE HURTING ME.
ACK, SORRY



OOOH, WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO TO GET YOU TO SLEEP WITH ME, ANYWAY?
HUH?

HELL HATH NO FURY, YOU KNOW


I'VE NEVER SLEPT WITH A WOMAN I WASN'T DATING, THOUGH
PFFT COURSE NOT.
OH, WAIT, DON'T TELL ME YOU'VE ONLY EVER SLEPT WITH SOMA?
YOU'RE NOT EVEN A VIRGIN, BUT YOU SURE ACT LIKE ONE.

When
ONLY ONE HOLE AT A TIME FOR YOU, HUH?
CHRIST, I SHOULD FEED YOU A BAR OF SOAP
SOMETIMES I STILL LOOK AT THE PHONE AND HOPE SHE'LL CALL
SOMETIMES I LIKE TO THINK THAT WE COULD GET BACK TOGETHER THEN.. LIKE NOTHING D EVER HAPPENED
I'D BE LYING IF I SAID I HAD, YEAH
YOU KNOW WHAT?
I THINK I KNOW WHAT IT IS YOU STILL HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN HER, HUH?

CAN'T DENY THAT
THEN IT'D LOOK REAL BAD IF I'D JUST JUMPED INTO BED WITH YOU STRAIGHT AWAY RIGHT?
BUT IMAGINE IT REALLY HAPPENED
STUPID, I KNOW
A YEAR? THAT'S GOING FAST BEING A ROMANTIC AND STRAIGHT INTO CREEPY TERRITORY!
HA!
WELL, THINK ABOUT IT! YOU'RE GOING TO JUST BE MASTUR-BATING ALONE ALL THAT TIME!
WHAT? WHY?
HRRM... I GUESS... MAYBE A YEAR?
THAT'S ALL WELL AND GOOD, BUT HOW LONG ARE YOU GOING TO KEEP CHASING THAT DREAM?
WELL AT LEAST YOU'RE HONEST ABOUT IT
I DO IT EVEN WHEN I HAVE A GIRLFRIEND
WHO CARES? I LOVE JERKING OFF. DO IT ALL THE TIME

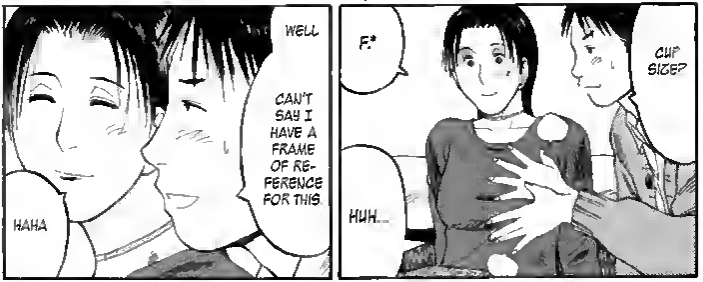
AFTER TONIGHT? HAH
...YOU'RE NO FUN AT LEAST PRETEND TO BE FLUS-TERED
SO, I'M GUESSING YOU'VE GOT TONS OF PORN STASHED UNDER HERE
YUP.
HUH?
WANT ME TO GIVE YOU SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT WHILE YOU RE HARD AT WORK, THEN?
WELL?
REALLY NOW
PLEASE, I'M WAY BEYOND REACTING TO A LITTLE CLEAVAGE AND A FLASH OF BRA
ぱっ
ぱっ

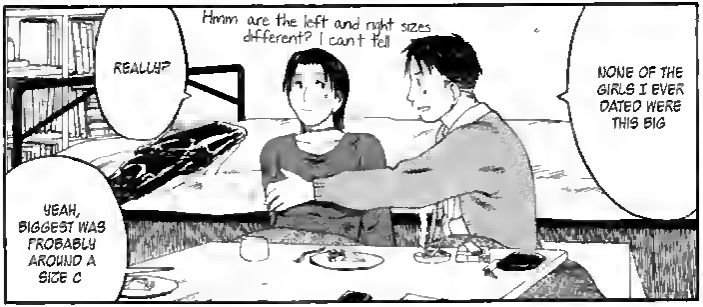
くいっ
ALRIGHT, QUIT IT WITH THE FLIRTING, IT'S NOT GONNA GET YOU ANY-WHERE
OKAY
HOW ABOUT THAT?
Y-YOUR AUREOLAE WERE QUITE STRIKING, MS YOSHI-MURA
I JUST SORT OF ACCEPTED IT
I HEARD IT ACTUALLY TENDS TO BOTHER WOMEN DURING PUBERTY
NOT ME
PRETTY PROUD OF YOUR CHEST, AREN'T YOU?

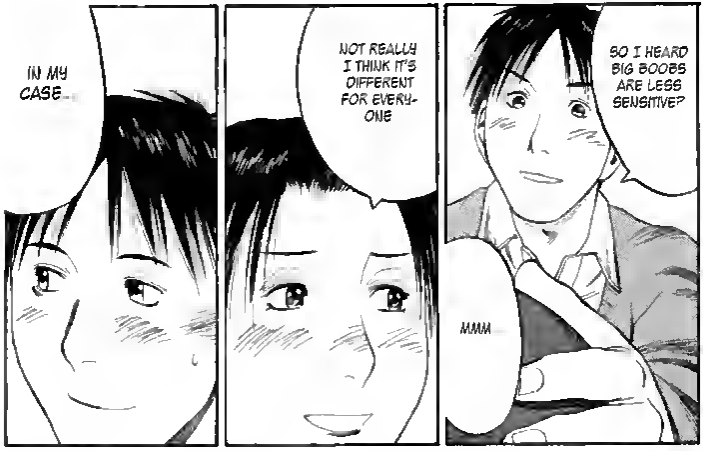
WANT TO TOUCH THEM?
I'LL PASS, THANKS
SHE MUSTA BEEN A TERRIBLE TEENAGER...
AND IT MADE THE BOYS SO EAGER TO DO ME FAVORS
FOND MEMO-RIES
THINK OF IT AS A PEACE OFFER-ING
FAP FODDER
GIMME A BREAK ALREADY
HAHA, YOU'RE RIGHT
USUALLY IT'S THE GUY WHO SAYS THAT
NOT EVEN A LITTLE?
C'MON, IT'S ONLY A LITTLE TOUCHING
NOPE
ちょん

DID YOU EVEN FEEL ANYTHING EXCEPT MY CLOTHES?
JUST BE A MAN AND GRAB THEM LIKE YOU NORMALLY WOULD!
Hahaha
Y-YOU
YOU BARELY BRUSHED IT!
Ahahah
YOU WERE SO CARE-FUL!
AHAHA!
HAHA HAHA!
WHA WHAT'RE LAUGHING ABOUT?
HAHA HAHA
YOU ASKED FOR IT.
MMM...
ゆさ
ゆさ
YOU SURE ABOUT THIS?
MHMM

* Equivalent to an American DD.



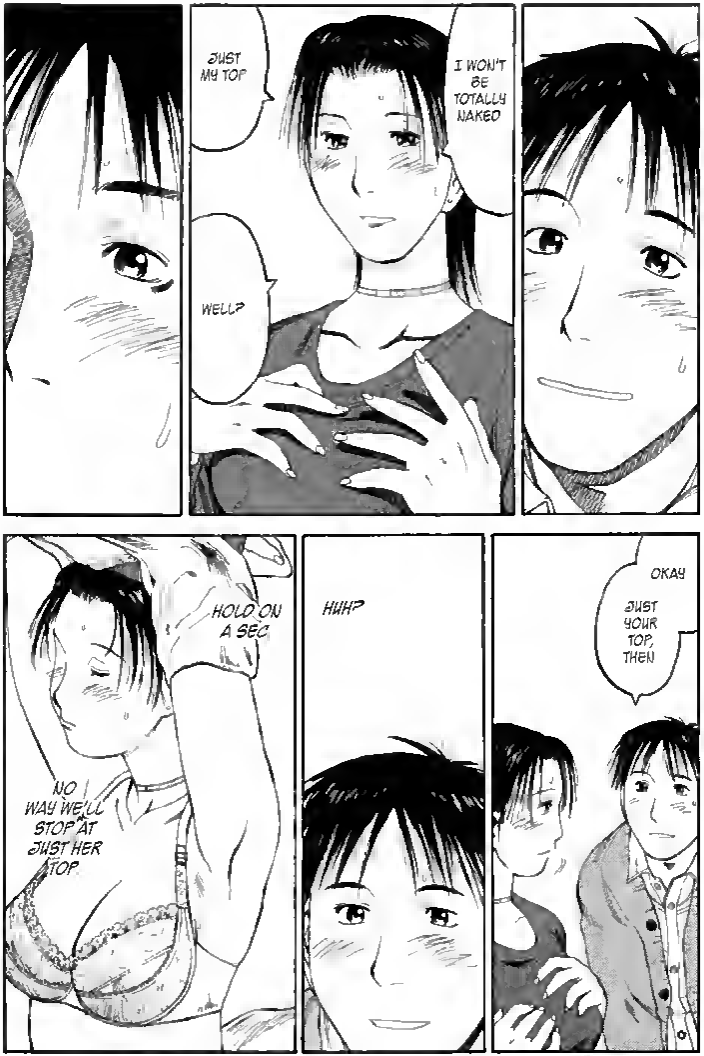

Hmm are the left and right sizes different? I can't tell
REALLY?
NONE OF THE GIRLS I EVER DATED WERE THIS BIG
YEAH, BIGGEST WAS PROBABLY AROUND A SIZE C



I THINK THEY'RE PLENTY SENSITIVE.
SKRCH
Y'KNOW...
THIS IS REALLY NICE

THEY'RE SO HEAVY
I CAN BARELY FIT EVEN ONE IN MY HAND
Nothing like Yoshino's
GOD DAMN
Aaaah

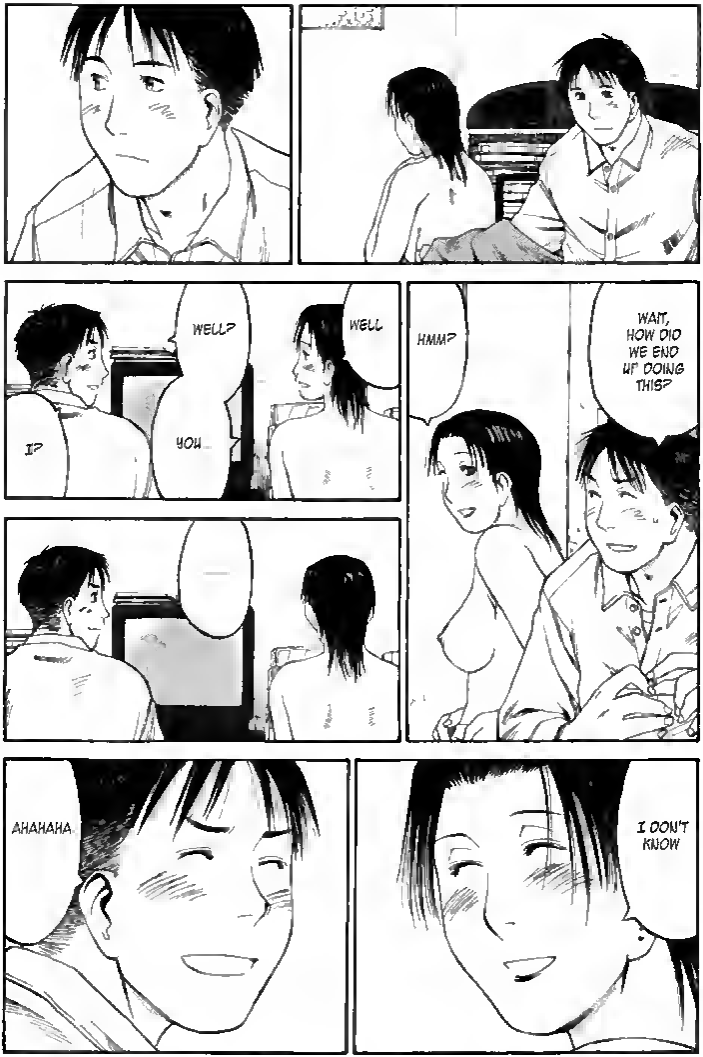
WANT ME TO TAKE OFF MY TOP?
Haah...
Haah...
JUST THE TOP.
HAHA
WHOA. NO, NO, IT'S OKAY I'LL STOP SORRY
I GOT CAUGHT UP IN THE MOOD
Ah!

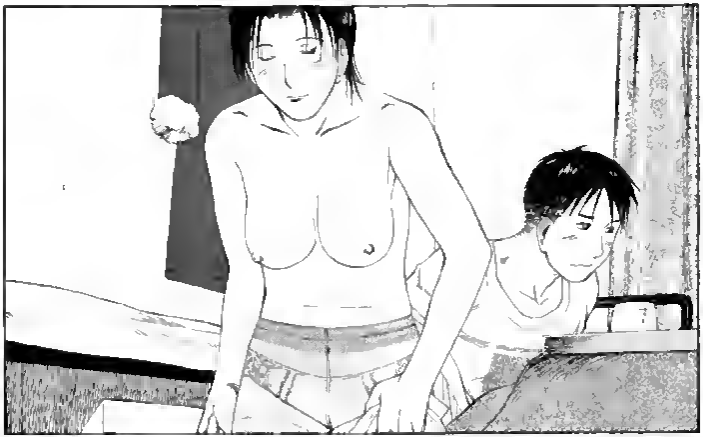

I WON'T BE TOTALLY NAKED
JUST MY TOP
WELL?
OKAY
JUST YOUR TOP, THEN
HUH?
HOLD ON A SEC
NO WAY WE'LL STOP AT JUST HER TOP

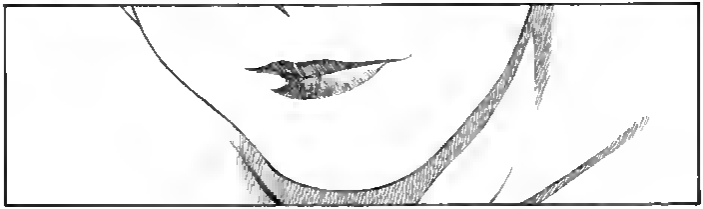
SHOULD I BE DOING THIS?
I KNOW THAT. SHE KNOWS THAT.
IS IT OKAY TO DO THIS?
IS IT?

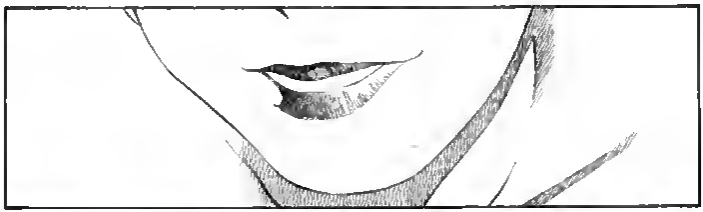
WANNA
DO IT?

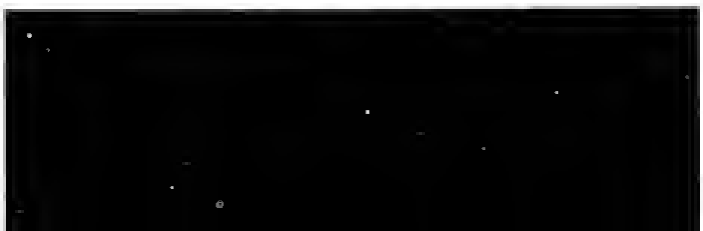
NOT LIKE WE HAVE ANYTHING MORE TO TALK ABOUT
WANT TO JUST GIVE IT A TRY?
GAH!!
AGH!
AHAHA TOUGH CALL, HUH?
URGH
JUST A TRY?
MHMM, JUST A TRY
Hahaha


...AUG
WELL?
WELL
IF
YOU...
HMM?
WAIT, HOW DID WE END UP DOING THIS?
AHAHAHA
I DON'T KNOW





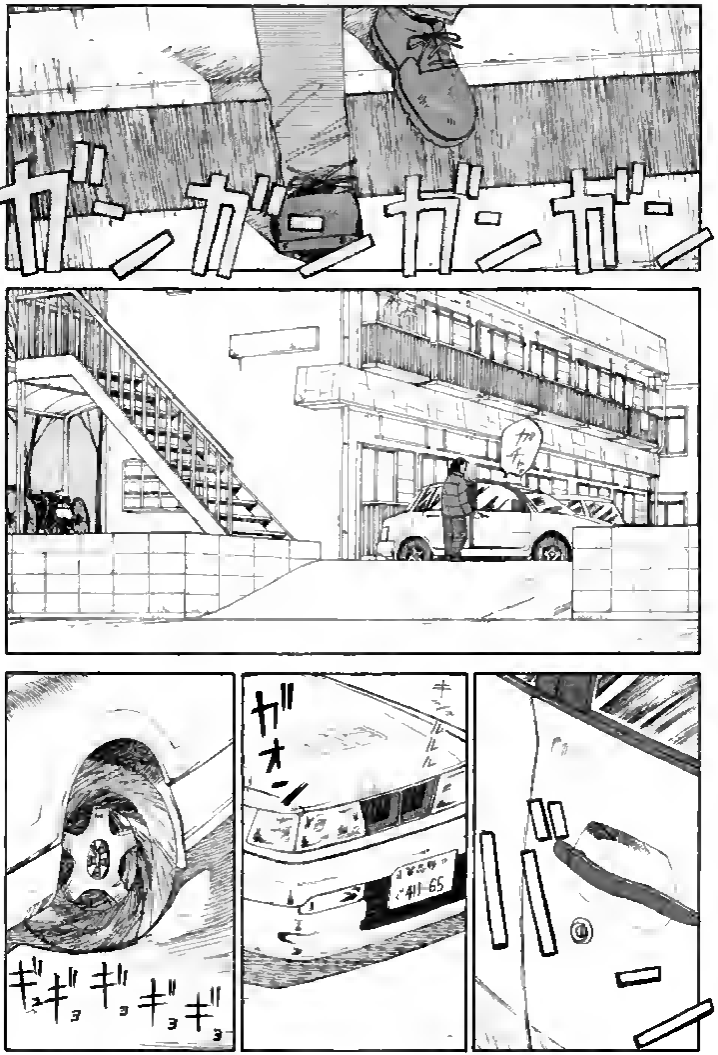




OH, OKAY. SO THE DIRECTION DOESN'T MATTER?
OKAY, SO SINCE THE MOVING POINT IS REVOLVING, THE DISTANCE TO THIS POINT IS CONSTANTLY FLUCTUATING BACK AND FORTH
MHMM...
MHMM
YOUR CELL PHONE?
SO I WAS TOTALLY WRONG, HUH...
Dammit
HELLO?
YES, SPEAKING
RRRRR

Chapter 23 - End

Chapter 24 - Intersection I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ガオン
ギュギュギュギュギュギュ

ブォー

OOOH...
MMMM
I'M COLD...
MMM...
THE FAN HEATER'S ON
AWAKE?
THOUGH, I FOR ONE APPROVE
MAYBE YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE SLEPT NAKED
YEAH, I CAN SEE HER DOING THAT
YOSHINO ALWAYS MADE SURE TO PUT ON HER CLOTHES BEFORE GOING TO SLEEP
MMM

I SHOULD'VE KNOWN YOU'D COMPARE ME TO HER
HAHA
ガチャ…
ゴオ
SO, WHAT DO YOU THINK?
YOU TWO ARE TOTALLY DIFFERENT
SORRY
NO, I DON'T MIND
WELL YEAH
NAH, I THINK YOU'RE FINE THE WAY YOU ARE
I'VE BEEN THINKING OF GOING ON A DIET, YES
MY HANDS FEEL SMALL ON YOU
IT'S LIKE YOU'RE ALL SOFT AND CUSHIONY
I MEAN RIGHT FROM YOUR BODIES
AHAHA

OH, AND I REALLY LIKE HOW EAGER YOU ARE
OH, YOU PERVERT!
Hahaha
ESPECIALLY YOUR ASS SLAPPING AGAINST ME WHEN I DO YOU FROM BEHIND
YOUR BODY JUST FEELS REALLY NICE Y KNOW?
YOU'RE ALMOST LIKE A PORN STAR IT'S LIKE YOU'RE WILLING TO DO ANYTHING
NO, REALLY, YOU'RE AMAZING, YOSHI-MURA
OH, REALLY?
Haha
OH, YOU'RE HARD AGAIN ♡

HAH
HAHA
HAHAHA
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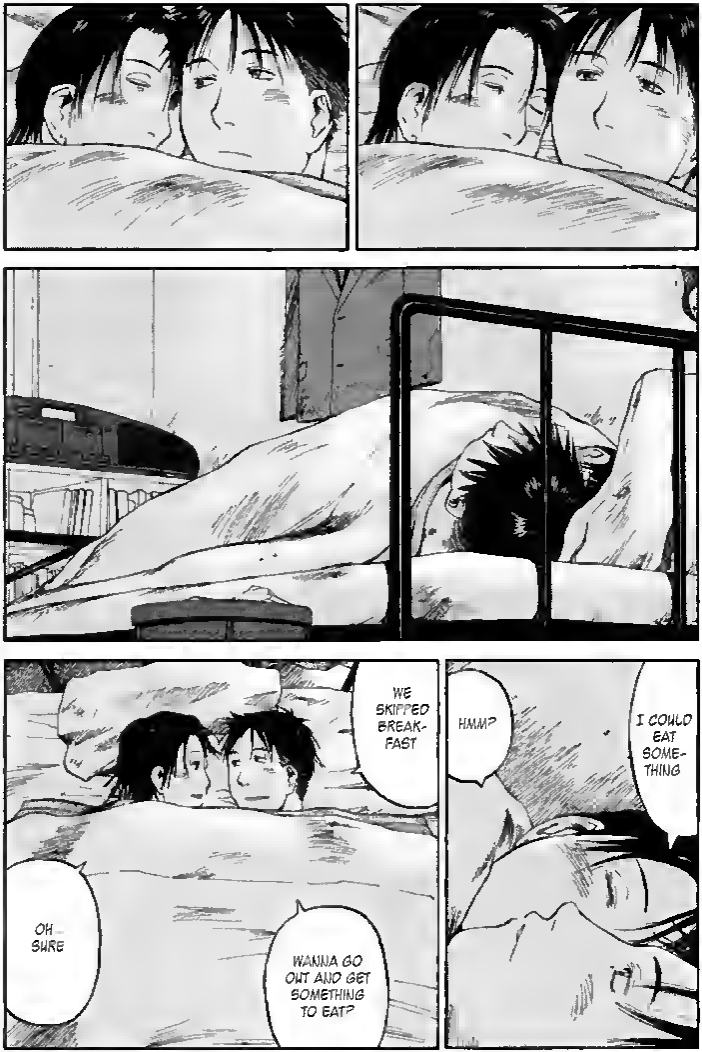
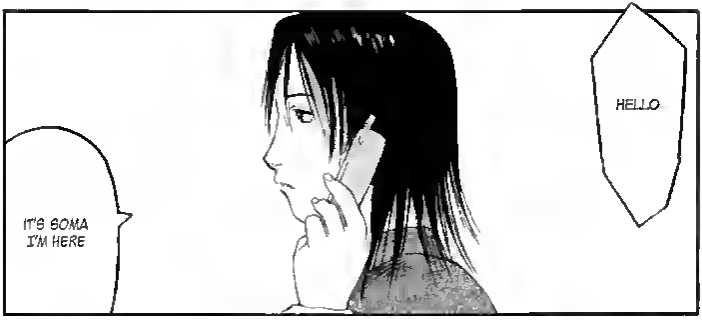
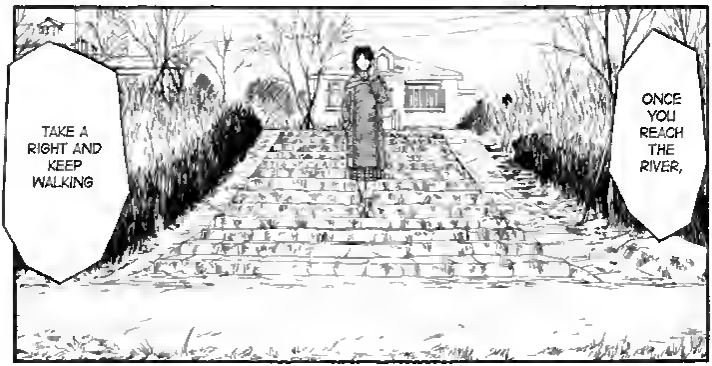

I COULD EAT SOME-THING
HMM?
WE SKIPPED BREAK-FAST
WANNA GO OUT AND GET SOMETHING TO EAT?
OH - SURE

GO AHEAD
THEN MIND IF I USE YOUR SHOWER?
WANT TO JOIN ME?
GUESS IT'D BE RUDE OF ME TO REFUSE A LADY


HELLO
IT'S SOMA I'M HERE

I'M AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE TUNNEL IN FRONT OF THE TRAIN TRACKS
HEAD TO THE RIVER BANK


ONCE YOU REACH THE RIVER,
TAKE A RIGHT AND KEEP WALKING

I'M SITTING ON A BENCH RIGHT NOW
I THINK THAT'S ENOUGH DIREC-TIONS
CHK

ひっ

PLEASE HAVE A SEAT
HELLO
HELLO

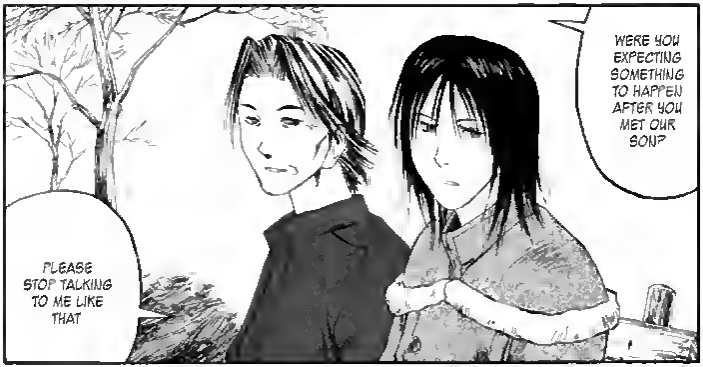
PARDON ME.
BUT WHY DID YOU INSIST ON MEETING WITH ME?
TO BE FRANK, CALLING ME OUT LIKE THIS CAUSES ME A GREAT DEAL OF INCONVENIENCE
MY
STARTING ON THE OFFENSIVE, ARE WE
I JUST THINK THERE'S BEEN A MISUNDERSTANDING

WE MET TO HAVE TEA A FEW TIMES THAT'S ALL
NOTHING MORE NOTHING LESS
I HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING UNTOWARD WITH YOUR HUSBAND
I DON'T KNOW
YOU SEEM QUITE SERIOUS CONSIDERING THAT
NOTHING TO HIDE?
NO-THING
I HAVEN'T BEEN FEELING WELL LATELY
I SEE

I HEARD YOU MET OUR SON, TOO
YES, I DID
HOW SHOULD I PUT IT...
WELL...
WHAT DID YOU THINK OF HIM?
YOUR HUSBAND DIDN'T TELL ME HE WAS BRINGING TAKAYUKI
IT WAS A TOTAL SURPRISE
HE SHATTERED MY PRECONCEPTIONS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO ARE HARD OF HEARING
I'M ASHAMED TO ADMIT IT
BUT IN MY HEAD I'D SORT OF DECIDED THAT THEY WERE ALL MORE OR LESS DEAF AND DUMB

MY SON ISN'T A TEXTBOOK FOR YOU TO STUDY
I LEARNED SO MUCH FROM HIM
YOU'RE WONDERING WHICH ONE OF US THE DEFECTIVE GENES CAME FROM, AREN'T YOU?
OF COURSE NOT
OH I
HE WAS HARD OF HEARING FROM BIRTH

I DIDN'T... IT HASN'T EVEN BEEN PROVEN THAT HEARING LOSS IS HEREDITARY
Actually I looked into it a little
MY GREAT UNCLE COULD HARDLY HEAR
I JUST THOUGHT THAT BASED ON THAT
WELL, I SUPPOSE IT DOESN'T MATTER
THAT'S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH ME!
AND IT'S NOT SOMETHING YOU SHOULD BE SHARING WITH ME, ANYWAY!


WERE YOU EXPECTING SOMETHING TO HAPPEN AFTER YOU MET OUR SON?
PLEASE STOP TALKING TO ME LIKE THAT

YOU RE IN LOVE WITH MY HUSBAND AREN'T YOU?

NO!

YOU CAN DENY IT ALL YOU WANT
BUT I CAN TELL FROM THE WAY YOU ACT
CALL IT THE WISDOM OF EXPERIENCE

YOU'RE NOT GIVING ME A CHANCE TO SPEAK
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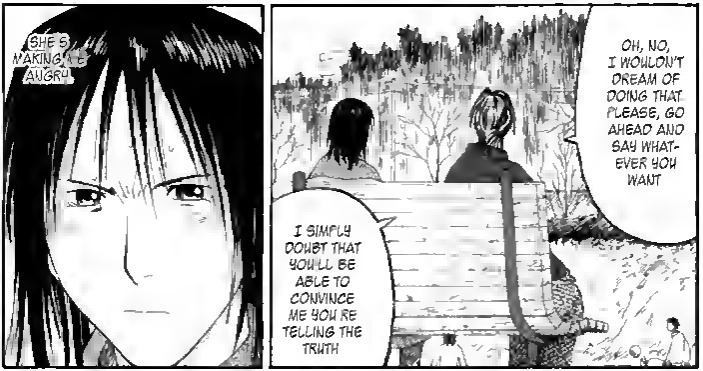
SHE'S MAKING ME ANGRY
OH, NO, I WOULDN'T DREAM OF DOING THAT. PLEASE, GO AHEAD AND SAY WHATEVER YOU WANT
I SIMPLY DOUBT THAT YOU'LL BE ABLE TO CONVINCE ME YOU'RE TELLING THE TRUTH

SO
JUST WHAT IS IT THAT YOU WANT ME TO DO?
DON'T MEET HIM ANYMORE
YOUR ACTIONS ARE HURTING SO MANY PEOPLE
THINK ABOUT THIS RATIONALLY

NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS,
HE AND YOU CAN NEVER BE TOGETHER
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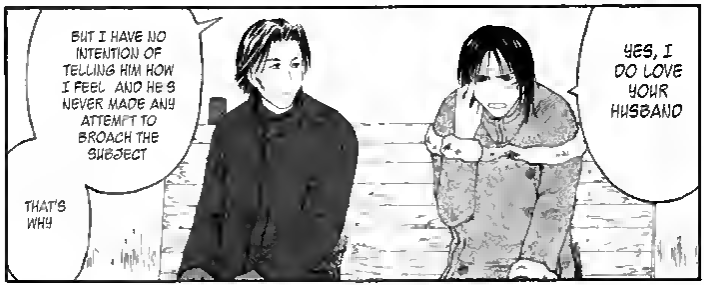
HURTING...
HURTING, YOU SAY?

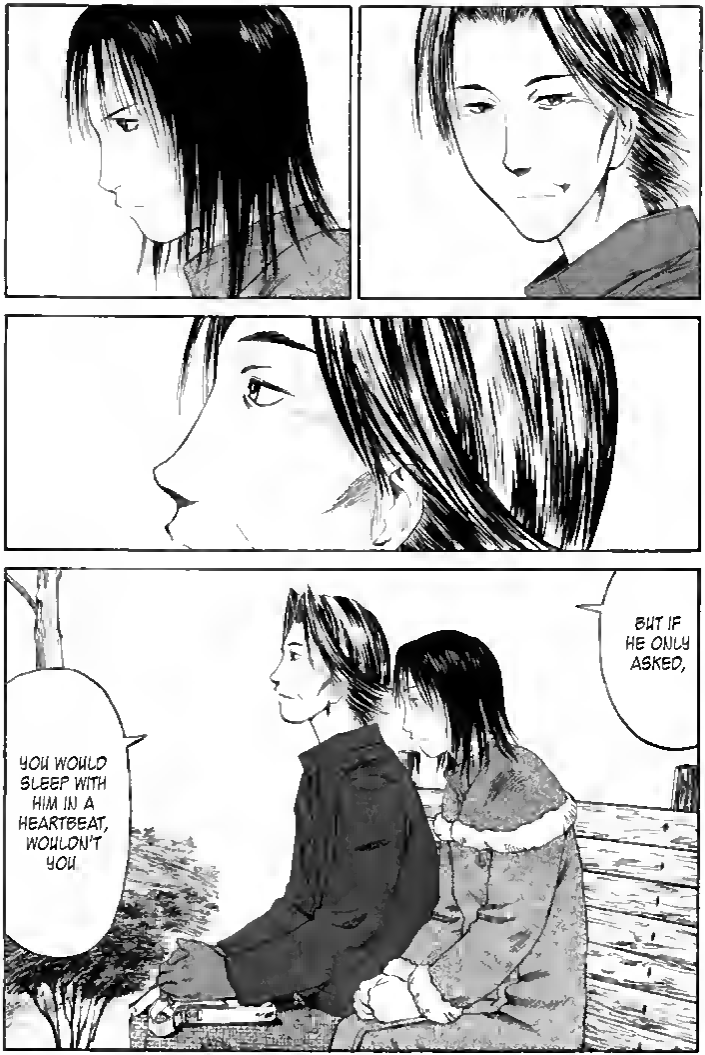
I'M THE ONE WHO'S HURTING THE MOST!

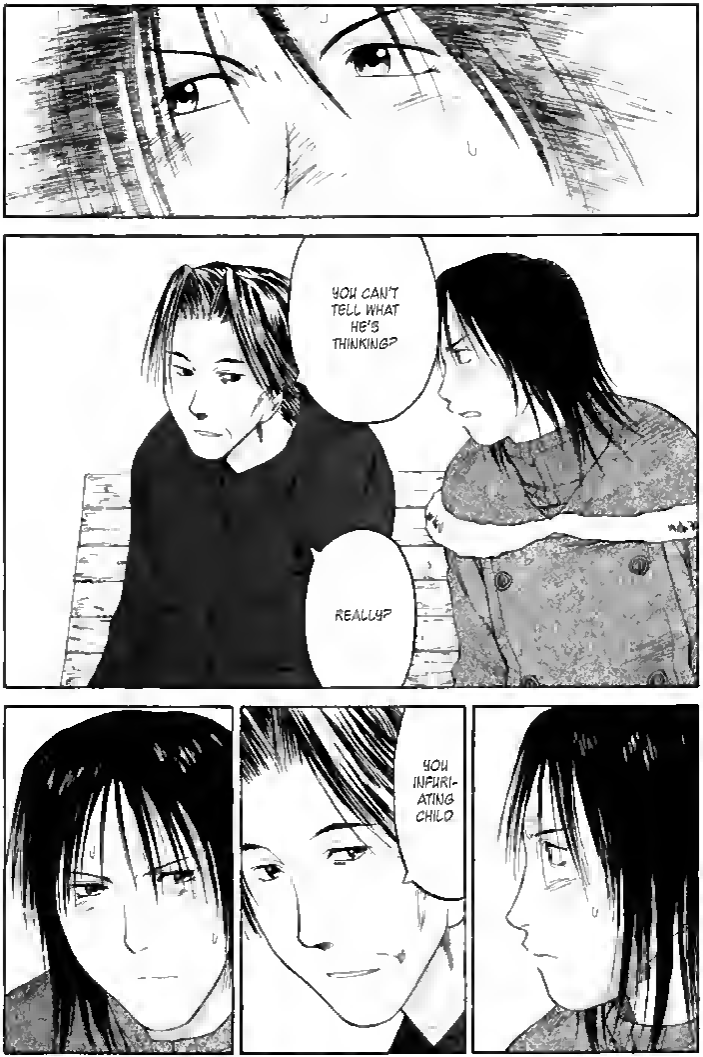

BUT I HAVE NO INTENTION OF TELLING HIM HOW I FEEL. AND HE'S NEVER MADE ANY ATTEMPT TO BROACH THE SUBJECT
THAT'S WHY
YES, I DO LOVE YOUR HUSBAND

THAT'S WHY I HAVEN'T EXPECTED ANYTHING TO COME FROM THIS. IT'S WHY I'VE BEEN TRYING TO KEEP MY DISTANCE
BUT THEN HE'LL BE THE ONE TO CONTACT ME,
OR HE'LL INTRODUCE ME TO HIS CHILD. AND I FIND MYSELF HOPING DESPITE MYSELF
BUT HE DOESN'T SAY A THING TO ME
I JUST CAN'T TELL WHAT HE'S THINKING!!

I HAD TO GET TREATMENT FOR AUTONOMIC IMBALANCE
THAT'S ALL THAT'S EVER HAPPENED BETWEEN US, AND STILL MY BOYFRIEND BROKE UP WITH ME OVER IT
AND NOW THAT I'M FINALLY STARTING TO GET OVER THAT
YOU CALL ME OUT HERE TO LECTURE ME LIKE I'M SOME LITTLE GIRL

THINK RATIONALLY?
THINKING RATIONALLY IS WHAT'S GOTTEN ME INTO ALL THIS TROUBLE!
BUT YOU DON'T NEED TO WORRY ABOUT ME ACTING ON MY INSTINCTS
I'VE ALREADY STOPPED SEEING YOUR HUSBAND
THERE'S ABSOLUTELY NO REASON YOU SHOULD BE BLAMING ME FOR ANYTHING
JUST LEAVE ME ALONE


BUT IF HE ONLY ASKED,
YOU WOULD SLEEP WITH HIM IN A HEARTBEAT, WOULDN'T YOU.


YOU CAN'T TELL WHAT HE'S THINKING?
REALLY?
YOU INFURIATING CHILD

The Useless Things I came to know.

I thought it was strange when I was in middle school.

In middle school, though, things were different. You could be bullied because of your personality, or your behavior. People didn't even necessarily bully the weak. It could be their peers, or sometimes even the strong.

Bullying in grade school was easy to understand. It happened because you were poor, or ugly, or stupid.

Be ignored

↓

Ignore in turn
(I thought I was stronger)

↓

Bullying that leaves evidence

- My things disappear or are broken
- Physical violence

↓

Immediately appeal to adults
(This underhandedness was very becoming of me)

↓

It stops for a short period

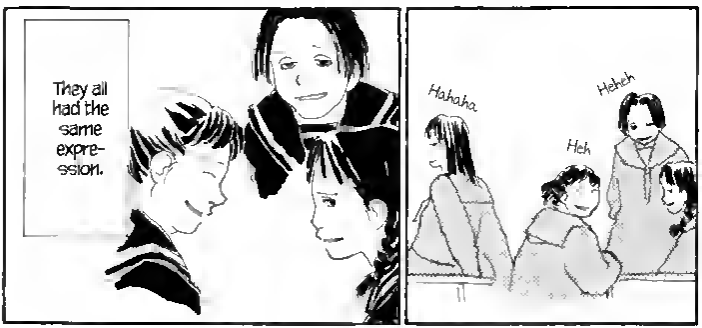
↓

Bullying that doesn't leave evidence

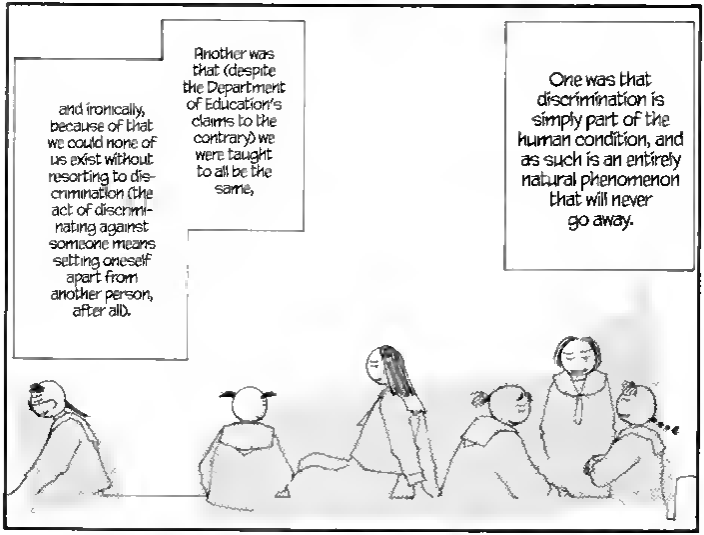
- Rumors
- Bullying by proxy

The internet wasn't ubiquitous like it is today, so it didn't escalate much from there, but...

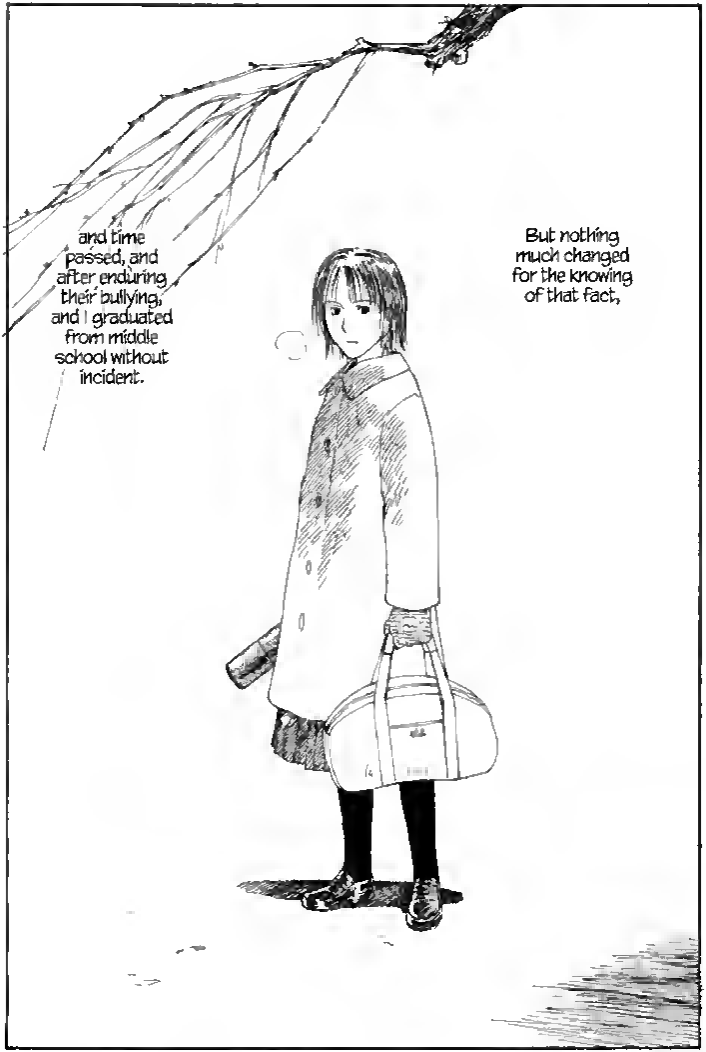
In my case, it followed this path of progression.



From that there were a few things I came to realize.


and ironically, because of that we could none of us exist without resorting to discrimination (the act of discriminating against someone means setting oneself apart from another person, after all).
Another was that (despite the Department of Education's claims to the contrary) we were taught to all be the same,
One was that discrimination is simply part of the human condition, and as such is an entirely natural phenomenon that will never go away.

I realized that truth with a ringing certainty.
Equality is a sham


and time passed, and after enduring their bullying, and I graduated from middle school without incident.
But nothing much changed for the knowing of that fact,